STUDENT RETENTION AND DIVERSITY STUDY

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga 2009

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Student Retention and Diversity Study 2009 (SRDS)
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Presentation of Findings
to
Chancellor Roger Brown
and Executive Team
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PURPOSE OF STUDY

- To support the need for data that would help UTC improve the recruitment and retention of a diverse student body
- Includes issues that could impact several multicultural groups at UTC: racial/ethnic minorities, women and men, students with disabilities, low-income students
- Also examined issues by classification (freshmen and sophomores vs. juniors and seniors)
- To inform the UTC Strategic Plan Implementation process
SURVEY SOURCES

- Tinto (1987) *Principles of Effective Retention*
- 2001 Student Retention Study (UTC/CASR)
- University of Rhode Island Diversity Survey
- Campus input
METHODOLOGY
SURVEYS

- Telephone survey of 426 randomly selected UTC students
- Supplemented with 82 paper surveys of student volunteers in the UC
- Total of 508 surveys out of goal of 600; 84.6% success rate
- 52-item questionnaire covering a variety of recruitment, retention and diversity issues
METHODOLOGY
FOCUS GROUPS

- Four Focus Groups with 16 student volunteers from the sample of 508 survey takers
- Two groups with freshmen & sophomores (10 participants; 5 each group)
- Two groups with juniors and seniors (6 participants; 3 each group)
- 20-question semi-structured interview guide covering a variety of recruitment and retention issues
NINE QUESTION AREAS ACROSS SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS

- Choosing UTC
- Recruitment Issues
- Adjusting to UTC
- Preparation for Future Job/Career
- Academic Issues
- Campus Involvement
- Diversity Issues
- Student Attrition
- Strengths & Weaknesses of UTC
KEY FINDINGS
CHOOSING UTC

- The majority of students said attending college was a norm for them, a stepping stone in continuing their education toward a promising career/future

- Top reasons students chose to attend UTC specifically:
  - Location
  - Cost/affordability
  - Had the student’s major
  - Interest in specific majors/opportunities associated with UTC
  - Smaller campus size/more intimate atmosphere
RECRUITMENT ISSUES

- Few respondents were recruited to attend UTC (12.1%)
- Of those who were recruited
  - 35.0% said ‘UTC visited my high school’
  - 28.3% ‘received letter in recruitment package from UTC’
  - 23.3% indicated ‘sports recruitment’
  - 21.7% said ‘academic recruitment’
  - 13.3% ‘attended a college recruitment event’
  - 10% said ‘other’ (most of these ‘knew someone at UTC’)
- White students were more likely to be recruited than ethnic minority students
- Students without disabilities were more likely to be recruited than students with disabilities
ADJUSTING TO UTC
HELPFUL IN ADJUSTMENT

- Freshmen/sophomores
  - Peers
  - Professors
  - Social organizations
  - University services

- Juniors/seniors
  - Peers
  - Advisors
  - Common goal among students
ADJUSTING TO UTC
PROBLEMATIC IN ADJUSTMENT

- Freshmen/sophomores
  - Parking
  - Housing
  - Limited class space

- Juniors/seniors
  - Bureaucratic hassles of transferring to UTC
  - Less involvement in campus activities due to being a commuter
PREPARATION FOR FUTURE JOB/CAREER ADVISEMENT

- Students feel that, in general, they are advised well in regard to both their majors (86.7% indicating very or fairly well) and their future jobs and career options (80.9% indicating very or fairly well)
  - Their advisors know them well
  - Their advisors are available to talk to them
  - The relationship with their advisor is good
- However, some students want more time and direction from their advisors
  - Sometimes feel ‘processed’ (‘just try to get you in and out’)
  - Sometimes are advised to take courses not required of their major (‘wasting time and money’)
PREPARATION FOR FUTURE JOB/CAREER CONCERNS

- **Freshmen/sophomores**
  - Questioned the necessity of general education courses
    - Some feel they are not useful
  - Concern over current economic situation
    - Will there be a job/career waiting when they graduate?
  - Some worried that their major area is too specialized
    - Leading to an expensive education, but unattainable career

- **Juniors/seniors**
  - Want a more structured curriculum with a detailed layout
    - Including being advised early to prepare for graduate school
    - Including a requirement to complete an internship
Internships were deemed especially beneficial in preparing for the future.

But many students noted that most available internships are too specialized for certain majors or are not advertised.

Only a quarter of survey respondents reported having an opportunity to complete an internship related to their major or career aspirations.

A majority of students (86.8%) feel that offering more internship opportunities would make UTC especially attractive to attend.
ACADEMIC ISSUES
EXPECTATIONS OF PROFESSORS

- 93.8% said ‘to help build the student’s intellectual abilities’
- 92.0% said ‘to make the course interesting’
- 85.1% said ‘to provide broad information apart from the text’
- 76.9% said ‘to use modern technology in the classroom and in assignments’
- 73.2% said ‘to help students find their career niche’
- 71.4% said ‘to make learning fun and easy’

- Expectations of professors varied by race/ethnicity, gender, and class ranking
ACADEMIC ISSUES
MORE INTERESTING/STIMULATING COURSES

- Most students said that more open class discussion is needed and that this stimulates intellectual conversation.

- Freshmen/sophomores also said
  - An interested and engaged professor makes the class itself interesting and engaging.

- Juniors/seniors also said
  - Better facilities – old run-down facilities are distracting and unaccommodating in the learning environment.
ACADEMIC ISSUES
SATISFYING EXPERIENCES RELATED TO COURSEWORK

- **Freshmen/sophomores**
  - Professors, especially when they:
    - Help students learn the material
    - Are enjoyable which adds to a positive classroom experience
- **Juniors/seniors**
  - Gaining applicable knowledge in the classroom
  - The joy of seeing the finished product of their labor and getting a good grade
ACADEMIC ISSUES
PROBLEMATIC EXPERIENCES RELATED TO COURSEWORK

- Freshmen/sophomores
  - Math Department
    - ‘Bad math teachers’
    - ‘Having to take remedial courses over and over again’
  - Taking instruction from non-credentialed instructors
  - Language barriers between international professors and local students

- Juniors/seniors
  - Lack of structure in some courses
  - Cost of textbooks
    - Causes delay in getting all needed books at beginning of semester
    - Causes them to get behind in their class work on day one
ACADEMIC ISSUES
STUDYING ABROAD

- Very few students reported participating in a study abroad program at UTC (2.4%), though over half indicated interest in doing so (55.7%)
  - A majority said that ‘more international programs’ would make UTC especially attractive to attend (71%)
  - A majority said that ‘more support for international programs’ would make UTC especially attractive to attend (69.6%)
- A majority who had a study abroad experience rated it as ‘excellent’ (33.3%) or ‘very good’ (50.0%)
- A semester session would work best for students
- The main difficulties are lack of time and money
ACADEMIC ISSUES
SERVICE LEARNING

- Three-fourths of students said they would be interested in a service learning project as part of their grade (76%)
- Similarly, when asked what would make UTC especially attractive to attend
  - 76.8% said ‘community volunteerism’
  - 74.8% said ‘service learning based courses’
  - 74.0% said ‘more opportunities to do community research’
- To make it more appealing, students suggested:
  - Highlighting the importance of fieldwork as part of the overall learning experience
  - Offering credit for participating
- Time and transportation were deemed challenges
CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

- Students reported minimal campus involvement
  - 28.7% involved in some type of organization
  - 23.9% in interest and departmental clubs
  - 11.9% in fraternities or sororities
  - 10% in faith-based organizations
  - 5.8% in an honor society

- To make UTC especially attractive to attend:
  - More ways for students to become involved (79.8%)
  - More campus entertainment options (72.6%)
  - A set time for organization meetings during the day with no classes meeting (68.8%)
OBSTACLES TO CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

- Focus group participants all agreed that there is not much campus involvement and suggested that lack of advertising and time constraints were obstacles.
- Freshmen/sophomores also noted:
  - GPA requirements limit involvement in some activities.
- Juniors/seniors also noted:
  - Lack of diverse activities on campus.
  - Most people involved in organizations are also involved in fraternities or sororities which creates an intimidating atmosphere for those not involved in Greek-letter organizations.
  - Lack of diversity within organizations; more diversity would make getting involved more appealing.
In general, students possessed positive opinions about diversity and multiculturalism at UTC. Students agreed that some forms of diversity are present, they hold positive attitudes toward multiculturalism, and they believe that diversity on campus improves the quality of education. However, a notable number of students were unsure about many issues. Students disagreed to one statement, ‘diversity at UTC is one of the reasons I chose to come here’. This is the number one statement to which faculty, administrators, and staff also disagreed in the FSWDS (2009).
DIVERSITY ISSUES
DISPARAGING REMARKS ON CAMPUS

- Though general attitudes toward multiculturalism were good, a third of students reported hearing people on campus make disparaging or insensitive remarks about specific groups of people on campus.
- On average, administrators were believed to ‘never’ make these remarks.
- Faculty ‘seldom’ made remarks about women, racial/ethnic minorities, GLBT groups, and persons of particular religious backgrounds.
- Students made remarks most frequently.
  - ‘Occasionally’ about women, racial/ethnic minorities, and GLBT groups.
  - ‘Seldom’ about five other multicultural groups.
DIVERSITY HARASSMENT ON CAMPUS

A quarter of students reported being harassed in some way at some point at UTC, the majority being women.

Only a small percent who reported experiencing harassment ever filed a complaint (7.8%).

The identities students believed to be involved in the harassment (in rank order):

- Race
- Sex/gender
- Ethnicity
- Religion

Being GLBT, low-income, or a person with a disability did not play much of a role in these incidents.
DIVERSITY
INCREASING DIVERSITY AT UTC

- In the focus groups, students were asked:
  - What are the main diversity issues at UTC?
    - Segregation in the cafeteria
    - Lack of diversity within fraternities and sororities
  - What are positive aspects of diversity at UTC?
    - UTC housing
  - How might we increase diversity at UTC?
    - Freshmen/sophomores felt that providing more multicultural events (e.g., Oak Street Roast) would bring more diverse groups of people together
    - Juniors/seniors suggested more student recruitment from abroad increasing international representation at UTC
STUDENT ATTRITION

- Over 1/2 of participants knew someone who had dropped out of college and a 1/3 felt they had wanted to drop out at some point.
- Nearly 3/4ths, however, said that it was “not at all likely” that they would do so.
- Students were given a list of 26 reasons for student attrition and asked to identify:
  - Why they thought other students may drop out of college.
  - If they knew someone who had dropped out of college, why that person did so.
  - If they had considered dropping out in the past, why they had considered it.
REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF COLLEGE

- Students ranked many of the reasons as important, but among the top two for each category were:
  - Why some students may drop out of college
    - Poor study habits
    - Inadequate time management
  - Why someone participants knew dropped out
    - Lack of motivation
    - Academic difficulty
  - Why participants had considered dropping out
    - Department/professor issues
    - Lack of motivation

- It’s important to note that there were multicultural differences in responses given
WEAKNESSES OF UTC

- Students were asked in the focus groups what one thing about UTC they would change if they could
- Freshmen/sophomores
  - Parking
  - Limited housing
- Juniors/seniors
  - Parking
  - More transparency and accountability in spending
STRENGTHS OF UTC

- Students were also asked what one thing about UTC they would keep the same if they could
- Freshmen/sophomores
  - Tuition
  - Cost/affordability
- Juniors/seniors
  - Small campus size
  - Faculty and staff
RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing success and retention level of students at UTC:

- Continue and enhance study skills training and assistance to students.
- Offer tutorial program in math at the university level, versus 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.
RECOMMENDATIONS, CON’T.

- 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.
RECOMMENDATIONS, CON’T.

- 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.