



# **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
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# 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’)
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# 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



# PREPARATION FOR FUTURE JOB/CAREER INTERNSHIPS

- 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
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# 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



# DIVERSITY ISSUES

## DIVERSITY & MULTICULTURALISM

- 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.

