

Division of Student Affairs

Strategic Planning & Implementation Strategies

2009-2010

The Division of Student Affairs at SMU formulated a strategic plan with an emphasis on enhancing student success, student learning and the overall quality of campus- life for all students. The development of this strategic plan coincides with the appointment of new leadership within the Division of Student Affairs, and is one that is embedded in the overall University strategic plan with particular attention to Goal Four: *To Support and Sustain Student Development and Quality Of Life*. Furthermore, the objectives of Goal Four provide the foundation of this strategic plan:

(<http://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU/StrategicPlan/GoalFour.aspx>)

Objective One: *Support for a living/learning environment that enhances personal exploration and growth.*

Objective Two: *Enhancement of critical student life programs related to student retention and growth.*

Objective Three: *Expansion and strengthening of student leadership development opportunities.*

Objective Four: *Enhancement of student intern programs throughout the University.*

The Strategic Plan for the Division of Student Affairs at SMU is the product of many hours of intentional, thoughtful work and involvement by Student Affairs professionals, faculty, university staff and students. It provides a “road map” for our continued development as a Division and is the culmination of our collective commitment to fostering the potential of each student (undergraduate and graduate) at the University.

Nationally in higher education, there is an increased emphasis on student learning (See [ACPA, 1994](#) & [NASPA, 1994](#) in this document). For any university that emphasizes student learning as a core principle, the identification of student learning outcomes and the assessment of the educational curriculum, activities, programs and services in support of these outcomes, is paramount. In addition, students and their parents have expectations that campuses will provide: safe and secure environments for student learning; high-quality facilities and services that are responsive to student needs in a technological and “instant” environment; and inside-of- and outside-of- the-classroom experiences that facilitate opportunities for student growth and development toward successful careers and life post graduation.

Student Affairs Strategic Plan GOALS

The following goals constitute the three ‘pillars’ of the Student Affairs Strategic Plan (additionally for each goal some general implementation strategies are listed).

Goal One: Ensuring that all students have the opportunity to be successful

We must commit ourselves to ensuring that all SMU students have the opportunity to be successful. In part, ‘success’ means that we will facilitate efforts to retain and graduate everyone who begins SMU as a first year or transfer student. Success also means that we are helping to create an environment that:

- A) Allows all students to take full advantage of the breadth and depth of academic and student life collaborative programs that SMU has to offer.
- B) Encourages students to make good choices regarding their health, safety and overall well being.
- C) Facilitates opportunities for students to develop quality relationships with other members of diverse student communities.
- D) Helps students achieve important developmental outcomes: leadership and identity development; career exploration and decision making; ethical and moral reasoning; etc.

Additionally, we must ensure that we: support similar rates of retention among all groups of students; create a strong safety net for students; develop a method of identifying students about whom we should have concern; evaluate the extent to which our

services, programs and activities are reaching students; discover how the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership Data (MSL) might help us better serve and outreach to those populations of students who are currently under-served (“Middle” Students, Commuters, Internationals, Transfers); commit ourselves to working with those students that we find more challenging or who do not seem to be as well connected to the institution.

To meet the challenges of *Ensuring that all students have the opportunity to be successful*, we need to focus on the following:

- 1) A Common Student Experience:** Enhance student connections to one another and to the university by creating a common set of experiences for all SMU students, with particular attention to the residential, curricular and co-curricular experience of first and second year students. The emphasis on building community among our undergraduate student population beyond particular interests groups is a recurring theme in much of SMU’s research about our challenges as an institution.

- 2) Substance Abuse Education and Prevention:** Implement and assess recommendations in the President’s Task Force on Substance Abuse and provide ongoing attention to substance abuse issues. Renovate the Memorial Student Health Center so that it becomes a central resource for Health and Wellness programs in support of recommendations of the President’s Substance Abuse Task Force.

- 3) Student Gathering Spaces:** Create and invest in the development of spaces and places on-campus that provide opportunities for the diverse members of our campus community to connect with one another, and that also facilitate and support university traditions, with particular attention to new and renovated residential halls, the student center, the chaplain’s office, the band hall; as well as other buildings and facilities that meet these needs.

Goal Two: Committing ourselves to the philosophy that “Learning Happens Everywhere” and “Learning Has No Boundaries.”

Our profession has called us to be more intentional about our roles as educators and to more deliberately focus our work on student learning and transformative education. This ideal is reinforced in the following two Student Affairs-related publications:

The Student Learning Imperative: (American College Personnel Association 1994).

If learning is the primary measure of institutional productivity by which quality of undergraduate education is determined, what and how much students learn must also be the criteria by which the value of student affairs is judged.

Learning Reconsidered: (1994 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators; American College Student Personnel Association)

A truly transformative education repeatedly exposes students to multiple opportunities for intentional learning through formal academic curriculum; student life; collaborative and co-curricular programming, community based and global experiences.

To meet the challenges of *The Student Learning Imperative* and *Learning Reconsidered* we need to:

- 1) Be more intentional about identifying, articulating and assessing the learning that occurs as a result of student involvement, engagement and participation in student affairs services, programs, and activities.
- 2) Partner with faculty to identify opportunities to help students make the connection between their inside-of the classroom and outside- of the classroom learning.
- 3) Apprise others regarding the role Student Affairs plays in the educational experience.
- 4) Expand the concept of student learning to include outside-of-campus opportunities and experiences
- 5) As members of a learning profession, commit ourselves to being life-long learners— investing in our own professional development; keeping abreast of the research in our field; engaging in research, presenting, and publishing.

In order to facilitate Learning Happens Everywhere experiences, we have committed to the following:

- 1) **Residential Education:** Partner with the Provost's office to develop a residential life/education model that intentionally involves faculty in the residential community in addition to continuing to support the rich social and learning experiences that the residence life program currently provides. Execute the concept of a Residential College/Commons model and build new and renovate existing residential facilities toward becoming a residential university.
- 2) **Leadership Development and Career Preparation:** Develop a comprehensive co- and curricular leadership program directed at students in all stages of leadership development, including courses, workshops, internships, student counseling and advisement, student work and leadership positions that help prepare students for leadership positions on campus and for the world of work and business, civic and other post-SMU leadership endeavors.
- 3) **Service- Learning:** Provide additional opportunities for service learning experiences and create faculty development and participation incentives that will increase the number of faculty that include service learning in their courses.

Goal Three: Maintaining an Exemplary Division of Student Affairs

While the word exemplary is a relative one and open to interpretation, for the purposes of our planning efforts some definitions of exemplary include: "A Division of Student Affairs..."

- 1) whose departments are operating in accordance with the *Council for Academic Standards* or other professional standards for student affairs and/or departments within Student Affairs.
- 2) that regularly assesses its strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities.
- 3) that is perceived by students, parents, faculty, administrators and campus departments as responsive to student needs, issues and concerns.
- 4) that is identified as a model for benchmarking by other colleges and universities due to our progressive programs, services, activities and our innovative approach to contemporary issues.
- 5) whose employees enjoy fulfilling careers.

To meet the challenges of *Developing and Maintaining an Exemplary Division of Student Affairs*, we need to accomplish the following:

Facilities: A major step toward our becoming an exemplary division of student affairs is to have buildings and/or facilities that support our vision for the student experience at SMU and that are the best examples of such facilities in the country—the Dedman Center for Lifetime Sports is one example of a student affairs building which meets that objective as are many of our recently renovated residence halls. Our list of student affairs buildings for development and/or renovation as previously mentioned includes: Residence Halls to meet the Sophomore Live-on requirement; the Memorial Student Health Center; a new Band Hall; an expanded or new Student Center; and a new Inter-Faith Center.

Competitive Salaries: We want to continue to attract and retain talented staff members to be part of the Division of Student Affairs. While performance will always remain the criteria for any salary increases, we will also regularly benchmark our staff salaries and target those positions which are not in the line with market salaries for salary increases. In September of 2010, the VPSA Office established an Equity Committee which is comprised of the VPSA's direct reports who represent some of the larger departments within the division. Chaired by the Executive Director of Finance and Human Resources Compensation Analyst, the charge of the committee is to identify commonalities in duties, responsibilities and capabilities for positions across the division. Salary inequities will also be identified and corrected per the recommendation of the VPSA.

Communication/Technology: Enhance our ability to communicate with students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni and others through print, web and other media. Increase technological support for student affairs departments and explore technological applications in support and/or delivery of appropriate services, programs and activities.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

An analysis of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) delineated five Critical Success Factors. To achieve the strategic vision outlined in this document, as a Division, we must:

- 1) Increase intra-divisional understanding.
- 2) Define our roles as educators.
- 3) Encourage staff to “let go of” obsolete/costly programming in order to create time and space for new ideas emerging from the strategic plan.
- 4) Use strategic planning as a guide to our every day work.
- 5) Identify funding strategies to support our strategic planning process.

CONCLUSION

A well-designed strategic plan is a living document. As such, our strategic plan will be reviewed and revised on a periodic basis in the months and years ahead. The changing needs of our students, as well as internal and external factors including: university priorities, the needs of the city of Dallas, parents, K-12 education, federal and state legislation, to name a few, will greatly shape all future revisions and modifications of this plan.