SMU Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan 2008-2011

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 & graduate) at the University.

Nationally, in higher education there is an increased emphasis on student learning (See ACPA, 1994 & NASPA, 1994 on page 2 of 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 are paramount. In addition, students and their parents have increased expectations that campuses will provide the following: 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 post graduate careers and life.

In response, the Division of Student Affairs at SMU has 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 imbedded in the overall University strategic plan with particular attention to *Goal Four:* To Support and Sustain Student Development and Quality Of Life. http://smu.edu/leadership/plan_goal4.asp

The following goals constitute the three *pillars* of the Student Affairs Strategic Plan:

Strategic Plan Goal One: Student Success

1) 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:

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

Additionally, we must ensure the following:

- a. facilitate similar rates of retention among different groups of students;
- b. create a strong safety net for students;
- c. develop a method of identifying students about whom we should have concern;
- d. determine the extent to which our services, programs and activities are reaching all students;
- e. discover how we might better serve and outreach to those populations of students who are currently under-served;
- f. 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 challenge of ensuring that all students have the opportunity to be successful, we need to focus on the following:

A Common Student Experience That Builds Community: The emphasis on building community among our undergraduate student population beyond particular interest groups is a recurring theme in much of our own research about our challenges as an institution. Provide 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.

Student Gathering Spaces: Create and invest in the development of spaces and places oncampus that provide opportunities for the diverse members of our campus community to connect with one another. Also invest in facilities which will facilitate and support university traditions, with particular attention to new and renovated residential halls, the student center, the Religious Life Center, the band hall; as well as other buildings and facilities that meet these needs.

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 Heath 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.

Strategic Plan Goal Two: Student Learning

2) 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 must:

- 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.
- Partner with faculty to identify opportunities to help students make the connection between their inside of the classroom and outside of the classroom learning.
- Apprise others regarding the role of Student Affairs plays in the educational experience.
- Expand the concept of student learning to include outside-of-campus opportunities and experiences
- 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 and engaging in research, presenting, and publishing.

In order to facilitate *Learning Happens Everywhere* experiences, our efforts are focused on the following:

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.

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. In particular, explore the concept of a Residential College/Commons model and build new and renovate existing residential facilities toward becoming a residential university.

Service Learning: Provide additional opportunities for students to obtain service learning experiences. Create faculty participation incentives that will increase the number of faculty that include service learning in their courses.

Strategic Plan Goal Three: Student Learning

3) Developing and 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...

- 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.
- that regularly assesses its strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities.
- that is perceived by students, parents, faculty, administrators and campus departments as responsive to student needs, issues and concerns.
- that is identified as a model for benchmarking by other colleges and universities due to our progressive programs, services, facilities, activities and our innovative approach to contemporary issues.
- which attracts the "best and brightest" employees who enjoy fulfilling careers.

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

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

Competitive Salaries: While performance will always remain the criteria for any salary increases, we will also periodically benchmark our staff salaries and target those positions which are not in the line with market salaries for salary increases.

Facilities: Provide 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 that meets that objective, as do 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 Religious Life Center.

Critical Success Factors

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

- Increase inter-departmental understanding through collaboration
- Define our roles as educators outside of the classroom
- Sunset certain existing projects in order to create time and space for new ideas emerging from the strategic plan
- Build strategic planning into an everyday practice
- Remember, Recite and Rally-Around the three pillars of the strategic plan
- 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. Needs and demands change quickly in today's colleges and universities The changing needs of our students will greatly shape all future revisions and modifications of this plan. Consideration of internal and external factors such as, university priorities, the needs of the city of Dallas, parental involvement and expectations, K-12 education, federal and state legislation.

For more information about SMU Student Affairs' strategic plan, please contact us through our website at http://smu.edu/studentaffairs/contact/