

SECTION:	11
DATE:	December 17, 2009

BOARD OF REGENTS
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

RECOMMENDATION

MONTHLY REPORT
FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ACTION REQUESTED

It is requested that the Faculty Affairs Committee Agenda for December 17, 2009 be received and placed on file and the Minutes of the October 20, 2009 meeting be received and placed on file.

STAFF SUMMARY

The topic for the December 17, 2009 Faculty Affairs Committee meeting will focus on student academic success efforts.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no fiscal impact.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION

The proposed action has been reviewed and is recommended for Board approval.

University Executive Officer
Provost and Executive Vice President

12-4-09
Date

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Board of Regents
Faculty Affairs Committee

December 17, 2009
12:45 – 1:30 p.m.
205 Welch Hall

AGENDA

Regular Agenda

Section 11 Monthly Report and Minutes (*Regent Parker, Chair*)

Status Report

Open Discussion: “Student Academic Success Efforts”

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF REGENTS

FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MINUTES

October 20, 2009
12:45-1:35 p.m.
205 Welch Hall

Attendees (seated at tables): R. Bullard, H. Bunsis, M. Evett, M. Higbee, Provost and Executive Vice President Kay, S. Moeller, R. Neely, Regent Parker (Chair), M. Rahman, D. Selman, Regent Sidlik (Vice Chair), Alida Westman

Guests (as signed in): B. Beard, D. Bennion, T. Brewer, T. Dallas, D. deLaski-Smith, A. Dow, J. Dunn, L. Findley, C. Foreman, R. Hanna, S. Kersey Otto, M. Jackson, R. Larson, L. Lee, B. Lindke, J. Mack, J. Margerum-Leys, A. Meyer, G. Frank Miller, K. Rusiniak, C. Shell, W. Shell, G. Ward, R. Woody, T. Venner, M. Zdrojkowski

Open Discussion: “Student Success Approaches Under Consideration”

Regent Parker, expressed thanks for participation in last month’s meeting and for the follow up emails she has received. She commented that people are truly engaged on this issue and want to see what can be done collectively.

Provost and Executive Vice President Kay remarked on the amount of feedback he has received and the passionate views that have been expressed. He stated that we are now focusing on strategies being considered for retention and student success and are looking at student success in broad terms, both from the perspective of making sure students entering the University have all the tools available to help them succeed, and in terms of a decrease in the number of students on probation, increased retention, decrease in time to graduation, and an increase in the number graduating. At the December meeting we should have three to four ideas on which to focus attention, invest resources, and move forward.

Provost Kay stated that, at the informal level, increased attention to this issue--reflected in blogs, emails, small group meetings, and the generation of new ideas that fit the character of the University--is very refreshing. At the formal level, the Retention Council has been working on retention issues for a number of years and has very specific focus areas. One area the provost is advocating is piloting freshman seminars of twenty to twenty-five students, utilizing our best faculty. He also suggested building upon some of the best practices already in existence, e.g., the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) cohort group funded by an NSF grant and the Reacting to the Past Conference, which brought students together in small cohort groups. Using such approaches in twenty or more sections of freshman seminar would provide a model which could be evaluated for effectiveness. Research literature clearly shows that freshman seminar—with the level of engagement it affords--is one of the best methods of ensuring student success.

John Dunn, Assistant Professor, English Language & Literature, Associate Director of First-Year Writing Program, and co-chair of the Retention Council, stated that—on the basis of synthesizing the different initiatives and projects the Retention Council has worked on over the past few years—the Council has come up with five areas worthy of attention: first year experience issues; early intervention; different policy and program procedures, e.g., scholarships maintenance requirements; academic support services, e.g., the Academic Projects Center; and issues around data analysis and collection, specifically

the expectation that initiatives should be amenable to monitoring and tracking and that there should be coordination in data collection. Regent Parker asked if data problems were the result of not capturing the data, the data not being captured all the time, inconsistency in its application, or technology issues. Dr. Dunn stated that all these problems apply and that they should be viewed in light of changing expectations and budget cuts to which support personnel have been vulnerable. He stated that in each of the five areas identified by the Retention Council, there are specific initiatives that have been developed by a range of faculty and administrators over the last three years, all of which are viable options.

Regent Parker asked if the “low hanging fruit” embedded in the larger initiatives are currently being worked upon; e.g., is there a plan to request funding for extending the hours of academic support services. Provost Kay stated that he is already getting funding requests--e.g., for the Writing Center and for academic advisors—and resources will be moved to whatever extent possible. Regent Parker said that she anticipates such items will be discussed prior to the December Board meeting and not left to be acted upon only at Board meeting dates. These funding issues should, at least, be discussed with John Lumm.

Ellen Gold, Director, University Health Services and co-chair of the Retention Council, stated that there are items on the Retention Council’s list of initiatives that don’t require a lot of funding; for example, a review of the academic probation policy and the system of recovery (the retake policy when a class is dropped or failed), which is incongruent with the Financial Aid probation policy.

Lynette Findley, Assistant Vice President for Retention and Student Success, commented on programs already being implemented which will impact our retention rates, such as the Promote Academic Survival and Success (PASS) program--which before this year was optional, but is now a mandatory academic intervention. She also mentioned that the Academic Advising Center is sending out folders to freshmen with information on their general education requirements, their program study sheets, and career information.

Donna Selman, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology, and Member At Large, EMU AAUP, stated that the General Education program would be the logical place to start thinking about retention. Rather than requiring first year seminars with zero credit hours, General Education classes could incorporate retention goals while offering the small class size that fosters mentoring. Provost Kay agreed that a first year seminar would not be a zero credit course, would have to be content laden, and be part of the General Education program. This would increase the burden on the faculty members to create some new goals for some of these courses. *Chris Foreman, Director, General Education*, stated that faculty would welcome the opportunity to provide this experience to their students. Incorporating this content into the General Education requirements has the advantages of having freshmen students taught by full-time faculty, incorporating the tools for them to succeed at no additional cost, and impressing their parents with this value added content. Some sort of minimal incentive, such as an honorarium, would show the faculty that their extra efforts are appreciated.

Mahmud Rahman, Professor, Accounting and Finance, and Vice President of Faculty Council, stated that we should look beyond coursework, give freshmen the freedom to participate in campus activities, the opportunity to take courses without the fear of failure, and time to adjust to college life.

Mark Higbee, Professor, History and Philosophy, applauded all those involved in promoting a structured first year program. He commented that a pilot of twenty-five first year seminars might not be enough to reach a sizeable portion of the first year class. He also warned that the criteria for first year seminar should be established, as should the method of assessing its effectiveness if a self-selected population—possibly of the more motivated students—takes the class. He emphasized that we need to systematically structure what our first semester students do and what they learn in order to help them succeed academically.

Alida Westman, Professor, Psychology, and Secretary, Faculty Council, stated that it is important to have tenure track faculty in freshman classes, not just because they are experienced teachers, but because, as established members of the campus community, they can direct students to areas in which they express interest and so aid in incorporating new students into campus life.

Greg Peoples, Ombudsman, remarked that it should be remembered that two thirds of the student body consists of older students who have their own unique concerns and needs.

Bob Neely, Associate Provost and AVP for Research, stated that our approach has to be multifaceted and unified in theme, particularly in the area of student support. Currently, we have people doing great work in multiple units, such as the University Writing Center, the Academic Project Center, Writing Across the Curriculum, the Holman Learning Center, and the Math Development Center. Makeshift housing for such services tells the students that, while the faculty wants to provide help, the University is not committed to these resources. We need to provide coordinated, visible facilities that speak to the value we place on our commitment to education and to a coordinated strategy to honor that commitment.

Lynette Findley stated that research supports the importance of the first semester in retention and student success. There are several different learning communities already in place, such as the Summer Incentive Program for students who have been denied admission. This program mandates structured study sessions, work on campus, and mentoring. We should look at programs that have been successful and also at the need for mandatory requirements in the programs we use. We also need to recognize the need to develop a component to retain students past sophomore year, when retention rates decrease markedly.

Provost Kay commented that we need to be cognizant of the different needs of all of our students, rather than focusing solely on a certain group. The Honors College is every bit as much a retention program as a program for students who barely make the admission requirements. We need to adopt diverse approaches to retention and, at the same time, make sure support services are available to all, at whatever hours they require them.

Regent Parker stated that she saw the discussion as taking a holistic approach and not just focusing on support for first year students or solely on academic support. While there are many ideas, some of which can be worked on now, it is necessary to concentrate on specifics if we are going to accomplish anything. The three to four ideas which she charged the Provost and the Retention Council with presenting at the December meeting will be the game changers.

Howard Bunsis, Past President & Treasurer, EMU AAUP and Professor, Accounting & Finance, asked what is the current retention rate and how has it changed over time. While the six year graduation rate is what the state focuses on, this may not be a fair assessment for EMU given our different student base. If it is unfair, are we going to suggest a different metric? Regent Parker charged the Retention Council with agreeing on what metrics will be used. While some metrics are imposed from the outside, this might not be the case for others and there are things we ought to be measuring for ourselves. We may have to use the six year graduation rate, but we can add in other metrics. Right now, there is no measure that takes us beyond the six year rate.

Dr. Bunsis asked if the Board, Provost, or President have enrollment goals and how they relate to the mix between undergraduate and graduate students. While we had a good year for enrollment, at 23,000 students, we need to consider transfer students—the group with the biggest percentage decline over time. He asked if there are studies showing a relationship between ACT scores and retention. Given the increase in enrollment this year, will the required ACT score increase next year? He raised the issue of class size—an attractive aspect of Eastern—and asked how it has changed over time, where does it stand

now, and do we have goals as to optimum size. There should be significant faculty input into the construction on our two major classroom buildings with regard to classroom size and into improvement of other academic buildings on campus. Finally, he asked if there is any relationship between the number of full-time faculty and retention. There have been dramatic changes in the number of full-time faculty over the last twenty years; has that led to any changes in retention?

Regent Parker agreed that these issues need to be explored. The incoming class has higher ACT scores than the previous one; it will be interesting to see if this will end up as a trend. She commented that on coming to Eastern, she was struck by the absence of data and data analysis and wondered what is the make-up of the typical Eastern student, if there is such a thing, and how does it differ from that of students on other campuses. She made the point that while it is necessary to hone the questions, we still have to be cognizant of the entire student base.

Dr. Higbee stated that we lose 10% of our students from the first to the second semester, and from the second to third semester another 18%. These statistics have been fairly flat for the past fifteen years. While there are a variety of reasons for this loss, the national literature shows that the main reason for lack of retention is lack of student engagement. While we need to address all the issues, strategically we need to act on the first year problem which would, in turn, address a large part of the second year problem. The biggest loss is from the second to the third semester, with another 5% loss from the third to fourth semesters and another 5% drop in the fifth semester. If we got credit for students who transfer out to graduate elsewhere, our numbers may be up 10%, but so would those of other schools. We need to accept the six year metric as that by which universities will be assessed. While we need to publicize the data on students transferring out to graduate, we will continue to be measured by the six year data.

Dr. Dunn stated that the context of Eastern is crucial. He argued that we have not done a good job in constructing a narrative that represents the student experience in term of the trajectory by which our students accomplish their education, with some of our best students taking more than six years to graduate. While we have to recognize external pressures and expectations, we also have to be able to respond with a coherent narrative that emphasizes the strengths and unique qualities of our campus. Regent Parker commented that the discussion was not started with the six year metric in mind, but has been intended to address student success and providing the student population with the tools for success.

Regent Parker thanked those present and adjourned the meeting at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Winifred Martin, Administrative Secretary
Academic Affairs