Memorandum

DATE: December 6, 2005

TO: Dr. Debra Austin
    VP for Academic Affairs and Provost

FROM: Henry L. Williams, Ph.D.
      Assistant Dean and Co-Chair of ILAC

RE: Summary of Recommendations for Addressing NSSE Deficiencies

The Institutional Level Assessment Committee (ILAC) has performed an initial analysis of the NSSE 2005 benchmark data and developed a short list of recommendations for your review and use. Comments on the FAMU NSSE responses were collected from faculty members, administrative representatives, and a student member of the ILAC. These comments were sifted to formulate university-wide recommendations in a report which has been redistributed to all ILAC members for their extended comments. This report is attached for your review and comments.

The initial priority areas identified by the Office of Institutional Research have been used to develop this report. Various detailed recommendations are included in the analysis of each focal area. However, an attempt has been made to extrapolate an over-arching strategic initiative that will incorporate and exploit an optimal number of these recommendations. The last section in the report presents an initial discussion of such an initiative.

After further enhancements, this report will be used in the development of the FAMU action plan for the BEAMS/NSSE project.

Enclosure(s): Summary of NSSE Recommendations

Cc: Dr. Gita Pitter
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FAMU IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/EQUAL ACCESS UNIVERSITY.
Summary of Recommendations For Addressing NSSE Deficiencies

Comments on the FAMU NSSE responses were collected from faculty members and administrative representatives on the Institutional-Level Assessment Committee (ILAC). These comments were reviewed and analyzed to formulate university-wide recommendations or action plans for effective resolution. The recommendations have been categorized and prioritized for further discussion. A final report on these recommendations will be made available to the Provost for further review and implementation in support of academic program enhancements and educational support activities.

The NSSE deficiencies were categorized into six main areas of concern:

- academic and intellectual experiences
- reading and writing
- additional collegiate experience
- quality of relationships
- time usage
- institutional environment
- educational and personal growth

Students were asked to express their opinions about these areas. Their responses were compared to those of students in other peer institutions as well as in the total number of respondent institutions.

I. Academic and Intellectual Experiences

Students generally do not complete reading assignments or homework before coming to class. They seldom receive oral or written feedback from their instructors on their academic performance. On occasion, there were serious conversations among students of different racial or ethnic groups, religious beliefs, political opinions, and personal values.

Recommendations:

1. Following a university-wide practice, each professor will incorporate homework and reading assignments as integral components of the overall grade in all freshman courses at the 1000-level. Weekly quizzes should be given to assess the productivity of the students.

2. Mandate mid-semester grade reporting for all university undergraduate students with grades electronically submitted to students. Additionally, the students’ assigned academic advisors could access these grades and schedule mid-semester conferences as appropriate.
3. Initiate, through the Student Government Association and the Office of Student Activities, diversity workshops as well as special days (possibly each month) celebrating the history, customs, foods, and traditions of various ethnic and racial groups.

4. The University should organize an annual series of “town hall meetings” to promote open dialogue and raise sensitivity awareness.

II. Reading and Writing

Students have been reading approximately 20% of the material in the assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings. Students have also been writing at about the same level in terms of the number of written pages or reports with fewer than 5 pages.

Recommendations:

1. To promote more reading among entering freshmen, the University should consider adding a required number of outside reading assignments to freshman-level courses, such as English composition, African-American History or Experience, Introduction to Sociology, and various Humanities options. Along those lines, perhaps the University could develop a mandatory book list for all freshmen whereby completion would be a condition for advancement to sophomore status. Many Universities are promoting university-wide voluntary readings, such as Oprah has made popular. It might also be that we can do something like this. Students can be allowed to vote on selections from a listing on what to read.

2. All entering freshmen would be required to follow-up their assigned readings with written book reports.

3. All required reading lists would be available to students during the summer prior to entering the University.

4. Students should be quizzed or tested often on reading materials, ensuring that they are being productive outside of the classroom.

5. Teachers should make the length of at least one written assignments no less than 5 pages, and include formatting suggestions.

III. Additional Collegiate Experience

Students seldom exercised or participated in physical fitness exercises at any level.

Recommendations:

1. The University should revise the general education sequence to include a two-hour physical education course as a requirement for graduation.

2. The University should foster a wellness culture throughout campus through:
   a. Making public service announcements (PSAs) and wellness-centered programming on FAMU-TV 20, WANM-FM 90.5, and other media sources.
   b. Incorporating walk trails and bike paths into the University’s long-term master plan in an effort to create a more pedestrian-friendly campus environment.
   c. Including a recreational room in all new housing construction projects.
d. Expanding bike parking.

3. Students should be encouraged to become more physically fit and participate in physical activities that help them to function better in the classroom (i.e., Fitness Day on Campus).

IV. Quality of Relationships

Students perceive that faculty members and administrative staff are somewhat indifferent to their scholastic and professional success.

Recommendations:

1. In general, there is very little interaction between FAMU faculty and students outside of the classroom. To encourage greater interaction and improve the depth and quality of relationships, the following actions are recommended:
   a. Establish a faculty mentoring program whereby entering FTICs would eventually be assigned a faculty member who would act as a significant resource in the campus life of the student.
   b. Plan and implement a calendar of social and extra-curricular events involving faculty-student interaction. Encourage faculty as well as colleges and schools to host study sessions inside dorms and other campus housing.
   c. Establish an incentive program for faculty participation.
   d. Teachers should schedule a time during their office hours each semester to meet with each student or student team. Teachers should aim to increase the out of class experiences or socialization experiences for students and perhaps increase their open door access.

2. Many students are of the opinion that FAMU administrative staff is uncaring, unprofessional and incompetent. This has fostered bad will and a lack of trust. To address this condition, the following measures are recommended:
   a. Frequent information sessions between administrative officials and students scheduled through the Student Government Association and the Office of Student Activities. Administrative personnel should be more attentive to students needs, scheduling times to meet with the student body in small groups, building stronger relationships.
   b. Establishment of an ad hoc student committee charged with the task of assisting University administration in the “re-engineering” of campus processes.
   c. Extensive customer service training of University staff and personnel.
   d. A mechanism for ensuring the correction and reporting of corrective actions taken on customer complaints and suggestions.
   e. The administrative staff should improve print communications and customer service. First year students especially should have one faculty member who can go to bat for them, if necessary, or give advice on how to work with office staff.
V. Time Usage

Students are not adequately preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities). They are performing at about the 20 to 30 percentile and do not appear to improve their time management skills from their freshmen to senior year. Students are working more off campus than on campus for pay.

Recommendations:
1. The University should assist in the inculcation of long-term study habits in all students by implementing study halls for all first and second-year students and mandate lab or tutorial attendance requirements for certain courses in science, mathematics, and english.
2. Teachers should aid students with time management suggestions (time logs, estimate of time requirements for certain activities).
3. The University should increase the number of jobs for competent students. A designated area should be created that lists jobs available on campus (i.e., Career Center, Student Activities).
4. Students should take more initiative to secure jobs that are available to them. A designated area should be created that lists jobs available off campus (i.e., Career Center, Student Activates).
5. The University should provide assistance to students that care for dependents (i.e., $, counseling, on-campus day care).

VI. Institutional Environment

Students believe that they are being provided with an adequate level of support needed to succeed academically.

Recommendations:
1. On the surface, it appears that there is not a great lack of academic support services at the University. Rather, many students simply fail to take advantage of the services available. Students tend to expect most of their academic assistance to come directly from their instructors. If this conjecture is true, then a University-wide policy regarding office hours must be established and rigidly enforced.
2. Administration, faculty, and staff should be provided with financial and non-financial incentives for their exceptional efforts to help students succeed.
3. Administration, faculty, and staff should introduce students to different cultures and backgrounds with guest speakers at convocations, assemblies, and forums. Some universities have international weeks when all cultures or nationalities at the school are represented and engaged. During that same week, the cafeteria serves a different international menu daily.
4. The University libraries are in the planning stages of developing a one-stop information commons to better support the information service needs of customers. Rather than run them around, attempts will be made to bring information services and resources to one place for them. This would include hardware, software and human resources. This will also be especially helpful to first year students.

VII. Educational and Personal Growth

Students generally feel confident about their academic experiences in acquiring a broad general education, in writing clearly and effectively, in thinking critically and analytically, and in using computing and information technology. It was notable that students became more confident as they progressed from freshmen to senior year.

Recommendations:
1. Each affected college and school should revamp requirements for courses included in the General Education Sequence in accordance with the college-level knowledge and competencies established for the General Education Program and the approved General Education Assessment Plan.
2. Each undergraduate program should revamp program and course requirements in accordance with approved Academic Learning Compacts for the program area and periodically measure and make corrections of student progress in accordance with the annual assessment plan.
3. The University should consider revising all undergraduate program curriculums to include one introductory-level course in computer concepts. Technology should be integrated into classroom assignments, and students should be required to use media centers where they can build technological skills as needed (i.e., Technology Tutorial Lab).
4. The University should, with all deliberate speed, establish plans and make the necessary investments in manpower, equipment and support to ensure a reliable and fully operational technology infrastructure.
5. Students should be tested more extensively on their writing skills. Standardized rubrics should be designed to assess this skill. Students should be required to attend the University Writing Lab as needed.

Conclusions and Final Recommendations to Provost

All of the recommendations above have been collectively reviewed and analyzed to determine a strategic approach to addressing the NSSE deficiencies. These initiatives should be incorporated into the regular University strategic planning process.

The foremost and primary initiative must be to address the deficiencies in basic reading, writing, and arithmetic knowledge and skills for all students. This ties in well with the concept of the academic learning compact with heavy emphasis on the core learning outcomes in communications and critical thinking. If students read better, they comprehend more and have higher levels of self-confidence. They are better disposed to engage in
The effect of this new level of acquired knowledge and skills is to enhance their academic and intellectual experiences on campus and to improve the quality of their relationships with their peers, their teachers and administrative support staff. Students should reflect a high degree of satisfaction with their academic programs from these interactions as well as a set of values consistent with the setting of realistic expectations and the attainment of positive goals.

The University should establish a university-wide Academic Support Center to build and enhance fundamental knowledge, skill, and competencies in the basic areas of learning: reading, writing, and arithmetic. This Academic Support Center will be the primary mechanism for addressing the academic deficits of students entering the University through General College and other means. Because of the complex relationship of poor academic preparation and performance to lack of self-esteem and destructive personal behavior, the Center will be organized to work with students in a holistic manner – mentally, socially, emotionally, and academically. The Center will be programmatic in thrust and research-driven in intent. Its mission will have a three-pronged focus:

1. The development and maintenance of an academic profile on each student for diagnostic purposes.
2. The design, implementation, and testing of teaching and learning strategies for the building of fundamental knowledge and skills.
3. The assessment and evaluation of student performance to provide feedback for the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning strategies.