

Phase 2 FSTF

Student Services Working Group

Summer Report

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Working Group Members

Co-chairs: Matt Burke, Katherine Jewell

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Ex Officio coordinator: Pamela McCafferty

Meeting Schedule and Tasks Accomplished

June 14, 2023	FSTF Phase 2 Kick-Off Meeting
June 20, 2023	Co-Chair Meeting Prep Meeting
June 21, 2023	Student Services Phase 2 Group Meeting (1)
June 26, 2023	Co-Chairs Summer Convening Meeting Student Services Working Document and Structure Established
June 28, 2023	Student Services Phase 2 Group Meeting (2)
July 5, 2023	No Meeting, sub-groups identified and individuals continued working on identifying existing information, ongoing initiatives, and initial data requests
July 13, 2023	Student Services Phase 2 Group Meeting (3) <i>delayed because of electrical outage on campus</i>
July 17, 2023	EC Weekly Meeting of Executive Sponsors and Co-Chairs
July 19, 2023	Student Services Phase 2 Group Meeting (4)
July 25, 2023	Student Services Co-Chair Meeting
July 26, 2023	Student Services Phase 2 Group Meeting (5) Finalized data requests and language, began entering requests into Google Form
July 31, 2023	EC Weekly Meeting of Executive Sponsors and Co-Chairs Academic, Student Affairs, and Administrative Co-Chairs Meeting
August 1-7, 2023	Drafting of Initial Data Requests Report and Recommendations

Overview

The Student Services Working group quickly identified three key focus areas for the first data collection round. The group received three suggestions from the review of the Phase 1 report and worked on making the language of these areas more specific and focused to guide conversations.

The three areas of focus in the group are straightforward yet broad, requiring significant effort to establish the current context of these areas, actions that are currently ongoing, and data collection needs. To facilitate the focus on data collection in the summer work of Phase 2, the group identified three sub-committees to review the current status and to identify the large amount of data needed to focus recommendations in these three areas.

Significantly, the efficiencies and effectiveness that will inform the working group's recommendations in these three areas relate to on-campus experiences that will define the residential, activities, and on-campus engagement opportunities that complement and enhance the academic life of Fitchburg State students. These programs are essential components of fulfilling the institution's mission as a liberal arts institution with professional programs in a small-college setting that offer high-quality academic instruction and educational opportunities on par with private colleges and universities with the accessibility of a public institution. To ensure accessibility, it is essential that the committee evaluate the collected data and pursue recommendations that evaluate the processes for resource allocation in line with these goals as outlined and emphasized in the university's Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

Creating an engaged campus community both in and out of the classroom requires alignment between the institution's administrative and academic culture and resource allocation and administrative structures. Recommendations in this working group grow from a priority of building an institutional culture that aligns with the core values of the university as a regional public university. Aligning administrative structures, facilities, and programs with this priority will create more effective and efficient processes that reduce waste while enriching the campus community in ways that will engage students, foster belonging, and support goals of enrollment and retention.

Priorities

The working group accepted the three focus areas recommended by the review of FSTF Phase 1 for Student Services. The group determined that focus area 3 should pertain specifically to student development and engagement, with an emphasis on entertainment options and events to increase student belonging and on-campus engagement, which pursue key priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan 2020-2025 as well as connect to focus areas 1 and 2.

The working group identified the following categories for data collection, contextualization, analysis, and specific recommendations:

Focus Area 1: Housing and Dining Services

Focus Area 2: Athletics and Recreation

Focus Area 3: On-Campus Entertainment and Engagement

Data/Information

The working group identified a large amount of contextual information needed to explain the current status of each focus area, as well as a list of data requests drawn from across the university as well as comparable institutions and regional data, such as market costs and resources.

The group identified existing data sources that are readily available or that address ongoing initiatives relevant to the areas identified in the working group. The group referenced these sources to build more specific recommendations and additional data requests. These sources include:

- CAS Standards for each engagement area, which are already being explored by Division of Student Affairs
- Benchmark best practices and consistent practices in engagement areas. The CDI already has done some preliminary research on 10 diversity centers and 24 LGBTQ+ centers, and this information is currently being synthesized.
- Current retention numbers and best practices to retain based on the student populations that prove to be our most likely to depart from the institution, available in the phase 2 folder.
- CDI Engagement numbers and breakdown for 2021-2023
- Campus climate survey results: 2018, 2020, 2022 (published [here](#))
- CSI data on student interests in social engagement, academic support, career advising, and counseling. In particular, group members are approaching this data and related recommendations with the following questions: Are students generally entering college with a strong desire to be socially engaged on campus and then actually engaging or does their desire to engage show a disconnect with student actions?
- Participation in academic support (peer tutoring, peer mentoring, academic success workshops, academic coaching) and Career Services support
- Career Fair data, including attendance / job landing success rates
- Commuter Student Appreciation Day information

The working group's list of data requests in the data request table indicates the questions posed to the information received or to be received, as well as some of the qualitative information sought. This first round of data requests aims to collect information in the following forms and to address needed information the group seeks in crafting recommendations for efficiencies, cost savings, and potential avenues for new revenue in the following areas.

Recommendation Executive Summary

Recommendations for Focus Area 1: Housing and Dining Services

The working group recommends reviewing existing and potential market demand in conversation with costs and facilities maintenance for housing and dining services. The group will use the collected data to recommend possible models for attractive housing and dining options for students to increase facility use, implement cost savings, and encourage greater on-campus engagement.

The working group will:

- Identify, through market surveys and other research methods, any potential new markets for on-campus housing and dining options, including but not limited to graduate and international students
- Review the plausibility of converting current housing options to more popular options in line with other area and comparable colleges and universities, including the potential for offering residential learning and social communities with existing spaces.
- Examine programmatic changes such as flexible dining options and residential community options for efficiencies and cost-savings, programs that will bring more students into on-campus housing and dining facilities, and improve the use of physical spaces.

Recommendations for Focus Area 2: Athletics and Recreation

Currently, athletic participation involves approximately 350 students, with the potential to increase to 400 in current athletic programs. The working group recommends that the data requested be used to review the expenses for each varsity sport and recreational services and facilities. The group will use collected data to determine potential cost savings and analyze data to understand athletics as a tool for recruitment and retention. Further consideration of facilities costs, management, and services in conversation with the potential for attracting new constituents and accompanying revenue will inform these recommendations.

The working group will:

- Gather data and analyze information about current athletic programs, facilities, and populations engaged
- Identify areas for potential growth, including opportunities for improvement in facilities use, revenue, and enrollment of new students

Recommendations for Focus Area 3: Student Entertainment and Engagement

The working group recommends assessing existing programming departments and structures. This review will produce recommendations for how to efficiently and effectively increase student and campus community engagement through services, entertainment, and activities that will attract and retain students and build an identifiable campus culture. Given the large span of activities on campus and sources of data, the group agreed to continue to refine the recommendations in this area after further exploration and contextualization.

Guiding recommendations and data requests in this area are the 2020 Campus Climate Survey and the 2022 Campus Climate Survey. Complicating recommendations in this area are assessing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on on-campus events and engagement, as well as access to student services. Several student support service areas experienced drop-offs in student engagement between 2020 and 2022: the ACT Center saw large decreases in students engaging in peer tutoring, especially in the 2020 - 2021 academic year when all tutoring services were fully online. Critical analysis of these factors will shape the evolution of recommendations in this area as further exploration of data proceeds.

The working group will:

- Assess what co-curricular and entertainment options students want using student survey data and other contextual information, keeping in mind what voices may not be included in these data sources.
- Review attendance information for current event programming to assess populations engaged and use that information to develop new co-curricular programs that will draw in new populations of students.
- Examine the structure, costs, and offerings of student development programs, including orientation, student organization events, DEI engagement initiatives, student employment, career services, and the events management office. In this section, contextual information regarding the limits on student fees for expenditures will need to structure recommendations. Furthermore, the working group will shape recommendations based on evaluating the processes for accessing resources, seeking to streamline these, and reviewing how funds are controlled and allocated. In particular, efficiencies will be found that align the process of securing resources with the resources available to best make use of staff time and resources.

Implementation Strategy

Implementation of Focus Area 1: Housing and Dining Services

- Current residency rates and dining facility use reflect the need to increase use by restructuring costs, providing new opportunities such as residential or living-learning communities, as well as exploring ongoing efforts to remake campus dining options. The data in these areas are relatively readily available and require analysis to compare with comparable institutions, off-campus costs and market rates, and student demand and potential new constituencies. The data collected this summer will also inform potential alternative uses for vacant properties.
- **Timeline:** recommendations in the fall, particularly after reviewing the new dining plans currently being implemented by Chartwells.

Implementation of Focus Area 2: Athletics and Recreation

- The number of current athletic programs, student participation, and recreational facilities use and costs are similarly readily available. Assessing potential expansion or cost structures and facilities will require obtaining comparable information from other institutions and the potential costs and return on investment for expanding athletic programs or offering different access points to facilities. Recommendations in this area will be key to recruiting potential students, providing new sources of revenue, and identifying efficiencies in facility use and programs.
- **Timeline:** recommendations in the fall.

Implementation of Focus Area 3: Student Entertainment and Engagement

- The university's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in its goals, strategies, and targets to be assessed. As a result, the working group focused on measuring current levels of student engagement and entertainment options with attention to these goals and their implementation. Pursuing the recommendations in this area will be essential to aligning university resource allocation with stated goals to recruit, retain, and graduate underrepresented students and to provide the appropriate programming and support services to ensure their success. The working group seeks to streamline processes regarding resource allocation to make the best use of staff time and labor while ensuring the widest possible range of opportunities for all students to engage with the university community outside of the classroom. Moreover, as an institution that emphasizes its role as an agent of social mobility, addressing the needs of students in these areas will be essential to fulfilling that mission.
- **Timeline:** recommendations in the fall.

Importance

Because the Student Services working group focuses on student experiences outside of the classroom, with connections to academic success, community engagement, and an overall sense of belonging that contributes to retention and graduation rates, our group agreed that a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion would guide our recommendations in these three areas. This emphasis of our working group engages with the core values established in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan of Accessibility and Enrichment, and they pursue the strategic imperatives of Equity and Inclusivity outlined therein (highlighted in bold below).

Currently, this section combines the importance and strategic goal mapping of the three focus areas. As the FSTF committee continues its work, these goals and strategies will be disaggregated into specific recommendations in each focus area.

Specifically, recommendations in this area pursue sub-items in **Goal Three**, and **strategy 6. Continue to provide educational opportunities and cultural programming that attract and engage members of the local community, including alumni.**

Goals for this area include establishing a baseline of attendance and ticket sales for campus events, with attention to students, alumni, and community members. There are specific enrollment targets for African American, Latinx, and first-generation undergraduate student enrollment and retention that are connected to evaluating the success of these initiatives.

Goal Four of the Strategic Plan, particularly reflecting the following strategies:

- 1. Increase the visible diversity of our faculty and staff in order to nurture the commitment to equity and inclusion throughout the campus community.**
- 5. Promote a culture of transparent organizational communication and decision making so that all members of the campus community feel valued and heard.**

Regarding strategy 1, the working group seeks to establish further information about the number of students participating in living-learning communities and to collect data about further opportunities in this area to achieve the target of 200-225 students participating in these initiatives. Events seek to increase the sense of belonging of faculty, staff, and students, particularly constituencies of underrepresented groups, and to build inclusive communities and engagement with cultural diversity. This goal relates to Goal Three, strategy 6 benchmarks and targets as well.

Recommendations will pursue **Goal Five**, specifically strategy 1. **Establish Fitchburg State's commitment to education justice and being a student ready campus as a cornerstone of the University's positioning strategy.**

Events on campus, housing and dining options (including living-learning communities), and athletic participation opportunities pursue this strategy and its targets by increasing on-campus offerings

Lastly, recommendations they pursue **Goal Six**, strategy 6. **Align academic and co-curricular program plans with long-term enrollment demands by taking a data-driven, mission-focused approach to evaluate performance of current offerings and guide development of new programs.**

Future Considerations

In developing the recommendations based on the returns from this summer's data requests, each area will require significant contextualization of existing strategies and programs in these areas. All three areas involve not only a review of Fitchburg State's programs and offerings, but information about comparable institutions and nearby colleges and universities. Furthermore, the information collected about student wants and needs regarding on-campus offerings in housing, dining services, athletics, and entertainment and engagement draw from many types of surveys and reports, each of which will need to be carefully examined for the populations who respond and whose voices might be excluded from these resources.

Other Accomplishments