National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 2014)

Student Survey Responses and Action Steps for Improvement

Report Compiled by:
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NSSE 2014 Student Survey Responses and Action Steps for Improvement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a survey used by many colleges and universities to assess their institutional effectiveness. The survey results are meant to assist institutions in developing programs and practices that promote student engagement. According to the research literature on higher education, students who have high levels of engagement (in and out of the classroom) tend to have high retention rates and are more likely to persist to complete their degree.

According to the USM freshmen and senior student responses on the recent NSSE Survey (2014), there were a number of frequent complaints about their college learning experiences. These student comments have been categorized into four themes and are listed below. Also, a list of action steps are noted in this report, suggested by the Deans, which are possible solutions that we (as a university community) could do in order to improve the student learning experiences on the campus.

### Quality of Teaching

**Student Comments about Teaching**

*Faculty often have unclear syllabi, unclear grading procedures, and unclear expectations of students.*

*Many faculty act as if they do not like teaching students; i.e. no passion about their course content, have boring lectures, and do not welcome students to ask questions in class, or encourage class discussions.*

*Very few courses have opportunities for active learning experiences in the classroom, nor do faculty incorporate ways for students to apply their learning to real-life situations.*

*Faculty teach outdated material and use old course materials.*

*Some faculty make honest efforts to help students if they don’t understand a course concept or assignment, others are the opposite and won’t help a student at all.*

*Poor interactions with faculty; some are often rude, unfair, rigid, intimidating, and sometimes prejudice.*

*Faculty need to update their teaching styles to include more technology in the classroom, some faculty still using overhead projectors.*

*Courses that have enthusiastic professors and interactive class discussions are wonderful learning experiences that help keep students interested in the subject material; courses that are purely a lecture & exam format could be put online because it is not worth coming to class. I can read lecture material at home.*

**Action Steps for Improving Teaching**

*Create clear expectations and teaching goals for faculty in each academic department, and hold faculty accountable for achieving those goals.*

*Create personal development workshops on “excellence of teaching” methods and practices both for live courses and online formats.*
*Create opportunities for faculty to constructively review and critique other faculty, by sitting in other classrooms.

*Have printed and online information available, and general assistance for faculty regarding using more advanced technology for classroom use.

*Inform faculty about what resources are available for students who need academic assistance or tutoring.

*Faculty need to be willing to create more flexible learning environments, and to have more positive interactions with students.

*Faculty should be involved in their department’s program and course assessment processes so that courses have stated learning outcomes for students.

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**Advising Issues**

**Student Comments about Advising**

*Advising and student support services are very poor, students have to figure out things on their own, no one assists in your degree course planning.

*Advisors don’t give students any information about possible internships, or how to obtain a field experience before graduation, or give assistance about how to connect to jobs in your field after graduation.

*Advisors do not give students any correct information about degree requirements so that students can graduate in a timely manner (i.e. less than 5-6 years).

*Advisors meetings are difficult to schedule, because they are often unavailable for meetings before or after class, and they do not respond to student emails.

*Advisors appear to be randomly assigned to students, and if you have a bad advisor then students have to actively seek another advisor who is kind enough to help you figure out the most relevant courses to take for the following semester. If I was forced to use my assigned advisor, I would have left USM.

*Advisors don’t know their own departmental curriculum requirements and they make costly mistakes to students who have taken the wrong courses, which delay graduation.

*Advisors do not seem to care about the student experience, and make very little efforts to assist students. I have received very little advising, and have gotten the run-around when I ask questions.

**Action Steps for Improving Advising**

*Create a document or online resources that explains “best practices in advising” for the faculty advisors, make clear expectations around advising responsibilities.
*Create ongoing advisor training sessions on how to help students with course scheduling, courses that have substitute options, information about careers/jobs, academic resources/tutors, internship opportunities, updated campus policies, etc.

*Create possibilities of using Graduate or Teaching Assistants and Peer Advisors who are well-trained to assist with advising students within the departments, which may help solve problems that arise, or catch issues early in student’s career.

*Create more “learning community” opportunities to build relationships between students and faculty advisors; which makes students feel more comfortable and promotes higher achievement.

## Course Scheduling

### Student Comments about Course Scheduling

*Too many required degree courses and too many required core courses, hinders students ability to graduate in a timely manner.

*Core courses are ridiculous, students should be able to take electives of their interest and not just shoved into a course to meet the core requirements.

*Required courses are often scheduled infrequently (every 2 years or so). No one tells students that some courses are rarely offered and no one is willing to give students other options (which courses could be substituted for another course).

*To graduate in 4 years is nearly impossible at USM, maybe if you take more than 5 courses a semester, courses during the summer, and you don’t have a job.

*Based upon the poor course offerings of required and elective courses, and courses offered only during certain time periods, there should be more courses offered online to accommodate student schedules—which would help students with degree completion.

*There are very few online course options. More courses in an online format would help non-traditional students with various work schedules and family situations.

### Action Steps for Improving Course Scheduling

*Review the Faculty Profiles, and ask faculty and departments to update any upcoming course schedules to accommodate more students.

*Review the core curriculum and set up ways to allow students more options and flexibility to meet the core requirements.

*Train faculty on ways to re-create their current onsite courses into an online format for non-traditional students, or students with time constraints.
*Ensure that students are able to access courses in their areas of interest; every effort should be made to help students achieve an acceptable course schedule.

*Eliminate roadblocks that prevent students from graduating when they expected; i.e. help students navigate through their program with ease and have some acceptable options to help students finish their program in a timely manner.

### Supportive Campus Environment

**Student Comments about Campus Experiences**

*It is difficult to transfer previous course credits to degree requirements or to core requirements.*

*Office staff and faculty are not always very friendly or helpful in assisting students. They act as if student questions are bothering them.*

*Students often get the “run-around” in an attempt to get a question answered about the core or other degree requirements. No one seems to know how to answer a simple question.*

*USM is not a school for non-traditional students; the marketing and advertisement that says USM accommodates non-traditional students is false; i.e. there are not enough online courses, no academic assistance is available in the evenings, no advisors available after office hours, faculty are not flexible for non-traditional working students, etc.*

*No sense of community on the campus, not a supportive environment for students, very rigid procedures.*

### Action Steps for Improving Campus Experiences

*University personnel/staff training sessions could be scheduled to help offices: 1) develop a new student-oriented perspective on campus, and 2) suggest better ways to serve our students.*

*Create better communication between offices about updated policies and procedures, and allow more flexibility for students with particular needs.*

*Recognize those faculty and staff who make sincere efforts to help students; excellence in service should be rewarded (professional development funds, salary incentives, etc).*