REPORT ON DIVERSITY SERVICES AT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

Introduction

As a result of the University of Southern Maine’s recent strategic planning process the University created a number of Task Teams to examine further key goals. Task Team #6 was charged with focusing on the University’s goal of “furthering the University’s commitment to diversity”. To accomplish this the Team proposed to conduct focus groups with students to assess the effectiveness of diversity services at the University.

In September 2011, three experienced facilitators, including Steve Wessler, were asked to submit proposals for conducting the student focus groups. Mr. Wessler’s proposal included a description of the methodology he planned to use in conducting the focus groups and the commitment to write a final report based on the data gathered from those focus groups. He agreed to meet with the advisory group for the project to discuss his proposal and to develop questions to ask students. Gabriel Demaine, the Coordinator for Diversity and Inclusivity Programming, was charged with the responsibility for managing all aspects of this project. In October 2011 Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Dahlia Lynn approved Mr. Wessler’s proposal.

The methodology used to gather data from students participating in focus groups involved asking students to discuss their experiences and concerns with the delivery of diversity services at the University. Students responded both orally in discussion with other participants and individually in writing. Students were told that their identity would remain confidential in the final report.
Ms. Demaine did remarkable work in organizing and coordinating the focus groups. The summary of students’ comments and concerns and the recommendations in this report are Steve Wessler’s alone. However, this project succeeded primarily because of the intelligence, drive and commitment of Ms. Demaine.

II. Focus Group Details
Between November 2011 and April 2012 Gabriel Demaine organized 6 focus groups. Each focus group lasted approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. 52 students attended the 6 focus groups.

Lewiston-Auburn College Students
Two focus groups conducted at Lewiston Auburn College included students from 3 courses, student government officers, students recommended by the Student Success Center, the Director of Communications and the Chair of the Community Engagement Diversity Action Group (formerly the LAC Diversity Committee). These students represented a diverse group in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity and disability. 27 students attended the two focus groups.

* Portland - Gorham student focus groups conducted on the Portland campus
* LGBTQ students - 6 students attended.
* Multicultural students - 7 students attended, 6 of whom were Muslim and 1 of whom was Christian.
* Students with disabilities - 8 students attended the focus group.
* Veteran Students - 4 students one staff member who works with students who are veterans.

A small portion of the information contained in this report came from focus groups conducted by Steve Wessler with students in 2011 in connection with a project examining workplace bullying at USM.

III. Findings From Focus Groups
This part of the report summarizes comments made by students in the focus groups about particular incidents involving conduct by students, faculty or staff that adversely affected the delivery of diversity service as well as more general observations about the delivery of those services.
Students’ recommendations for making the delivery of diversity services more effective are also included. Issues affecting LGBTQ students, religious students, students of color, Muslim students, students with disabilities, students who are veterans, students with young children, students who need financial aid, and students who need assistance in writing are discussed in separate sections.

Most of the comments below are quotations from students. Some comments, however, are paraphrased from students’ oral comments made during the focus groups.

A. Issues Affecting LGBTQ Students
1. Incidents
   * “My experience is that some professors address their students with a presumption that everyone is straight and that this perspective affects the material they are delivering to class. I once heard a professor say that he ‘can tell who was gay from their eyes.’”
   * “My professor was doing a simple example based on gender. She only used male and female. As someone with trans politics that was frustrating.”
   * “My professor often silenced queer students if they tried to make the class relevant to their lives.”
   * “I’ve seen professors who know they have LGBTQ students in their classroom and they act completely different when the LGBTQ students are not around.”
   * “An out lesbian student who was dealing with anti-gay sentiment, language and harassment from a faculty member suffered from depression and anxiety.... She had to take a leave of absence from school for a semester because of this.”
   * “A student came out as a lesbian. After coming out, she was shunned by her former friends and her on-campus co-workers. She was harassed and stalked by a student one evening in the Old Port and called names. She was even outed in a classroom by a faculty member who had the heard a rumor that the student was gay.”

2. Comments
* From an LAC student. “Professors in general are really open about being gay/homosexual. Seeing all the ‘safe zone’ stickers on teachers’ doors helps me feel comfortable being gay and encouraged me to incorporate being gay into my course work.”

* “Being gay and being a student at LAC does not seem to work for me. We need more services at LAC and even a group for the LGBTQ community at LAC.”

* USM needs more programming for older LGBTQ students.

B. Issues Affecting Religious Students

1. Incidents (the experiences of Muslim students are addressed in part E)

* “Because I am a non-traditional student (over 50 years old) and your basic everyday spirit filled Christian, I think that my ability to feel connected to the campus community is seriously affected by the dawning of my religion. It has virtually affected all of my classes with the exception of math and computer.”

* “I had a professor who told me that I was wrong in my paper when I quoted a biblical verse and she was teaching critical thinking. I was very put out and I thought she was rude for telling me that.”

* “I was told ‘how can you believe that’ [when talking about my religion].”

* “I am an atheist but see the attacks on Christianity [in classes].”

* “A student was taking a class that had a certain perspective that Christianity helped create the problem. When a student who is Christian, challenged the faculty perspective the faculty member accused the student of having been brainwashed by his/her religion.”

* “I have felt degraded because I am Christian. In a literature class a professor cut down Christianity.” Eight other students in the focus group commented that they have seen this type of behavior from professors in classrooms.

2. Comments

* “I am a Buddhist and realized that if I could find a place to chant it would reduce my stress. A Space Apart is that place but it is hard to find. Mostly Muslims use it. It is hard to figure out how to share it.”

* “LAC has a quiet meditation place, always with the doors open.”

* “For me having a teacher [who did] not cut down my religion (Christianity) while teaching was so important and helpful.... [J]ust because Christianity
has been biased and violent in the past doesn’t mean my beliefs are like that. Most teachers cut it down and point out faults.”

C. Issues Affecting Students of Color
1. Incidents
   * “During an in-class presentation about sexism and rap/hip hop the white professor contested what she was saying in a dismissive and somewhat belittling way.” The student was a woman of color.
   * “Husky Fest on a majority white campus, [white students] playing reggae music and wearing sombreros. Talk about cultural appropriation.”
   * “A professor made gross generalizations about Black American Culture to a class full of white students who wouldn’t have known better.”
   * “I’ve heard many comments about minorities saying what bad people they are because one person decided to do something terrible.”
   * “The rampant use of gyped and gay.”
   * “Class discussion that equated Arab, Muslim and skin color as the same.”
   * A professor said “there’s no good Indian but for a dead one.”
   * “People use the word nigger in some sort of consciously naughty way.”
   * “Routinely people complain about African students, how they ‘hate them’ for various reasons.”
   * “A professor said ‘what percentage Indian are you?’, ‘You mean your tribe supports you running for state rep even though you look white.’”
   * A professor teaching a class about issues affecting black people “taught stereotypes of black culture and was unequipped to teach the subject. Teaching students to believe misconceptions.”
   * “Native American student is told, ‘Go back to the reservation’ by others at a dorm in Gorham.”

2. Comments
   * Several students of color at LAC noted that there was “no programming” for them and other students of color. They would like to have a discussion group in which students of color could support each other. One student added that LAC needs more faculty and staff of color. Another said that he feels like an “outcast” at the college.
   * “One thing that has been the most difficult here [at USM] in terms of diversity would be the awkwardness around race and ethnicity.”
* “Being a person of color is also difficult since LAC is predominantly white students, white faculty, white culture...hard to feel a part of the community.”
* “More faculty/staff diversity is needed to see the beauty of the campus and to recruit from the community.”

3. Recommendation from Students
* Provide a discussion and support group for students of color at LAC.

D. Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees
1. Incidents
* “A student who came to the US as a refugee said she hears comments from students such as “How did you get here?” She responds, “I drove”.
* “A low-income immigrant female student loses her textbook, asks a faculty [member] if she could borrow the book...and is told, ‘That is your problem. You need to have $ to be a student.’ Student is forced to drop course and considers leaving USM for another school.”
* “Some professors expect that immigrant students will not be smart enough to handle the work.”
* My professor never asked me any questions in class. At the end of the semester I talked to her for the first time and she was surprised that I was fluent in English.”
* “I have a 3.68 GPA. I can do the work. The English is the problem. I moved here from Iran 3 years ago. I have taken ESL classes and English comp and English lit. I need better English and it is difficult to find help. Teachers give more attention to American born students. They don’t listen to me and ignore me. I do get good academic support and have tutors in math, chem and econ.”
* “A Somali student had a teacher who in front of the class asked her ‘Am I speaking to fast for you?’ The student has no problem following the professor’s remarks. This made her feel she was being separated from the class. It was embarrassing and made her distracted during the rest of the class.”

E. Issues Affecting Muslim Students
1. Incidents
* “I am a nursing student and a Muslim and one day [in class] two Arab women were talking and the men in the class kept telling things about
Arabs that made me so uncomfortable and I didn’t know how to tell them they were being rude.”
* “I am uncomfortable with the total lack of sensitivity of some professors here at USM…. The examples they give about Muslims are not always true.”
* “When ever something happens in the wider world, like bomb episodes in Afghanistan and American soldiers die, I get bad looks from other students. I like peace. I do not want somebody killed. I want students to know this.”
* “Sometimes [students] need to make terrorist jokes, comparing me to Osama Bin Laden. ‘We killed your father.’”
* “I have heard, ‘Oh you’re from Afghanistan, what building are going to blow up next. Don’t bomb my house.’ When I tell them that I am married they say ‘so who is it to, your sister or your cousin.’”
* “One professor used frequent examples of Muslims doing something badly. She talked about Muslim men treating women poorly. I spoke to the professor and she told me that she knows about Muslims because she grew up in India.”

a. Concerns with Food Service
* “I don’t know the ingredients of food and cannot tell what has pork in it.”
* “I asked [at the Campus Center cafeteria] whether the chicken in the chicken sandwiches was cooked in the same oil that is used to cook pork. The person I spoke to said yes.”
* “I only eat vegetables to avoid the meat and the possibility of eating pork.”
* “Are the slicers for pizzas and sandwiches that cut pork used for other food?”

b. Prayer
* “It is a 5 to 7 minute walk from Wishcamper to the interfaith prayer chapel on Brighton Ave.”
* “Well one incident that occurred in USM that made me uncomfortable was that I told my professor that I was going to pray and she loudly said in front of the class ‘if none of us can have breaks during class what gives you a reason to go ahead and take a 10 minute break to pray.’ And everyone agreed with her. So that put me in an uncomfortable place.”
* “We would like to pray in the major buildings: Campus Center, Masterton, Wishcamper, Luther Bonney, Science Building and Payson Smith.”
* “The interfaith chapel closes at 4 pm so there is no place to pray after that, if we are here for classes, studying or work study jobs.”
* “I feel I need to teach my professors about Muslim prayer.”
* “I have 4 hours clinicals in the nursing school and cannot wait to pray after class.”

2. Comments
* “Seeking input from students such as this [focus group] is positive in my opinion.”
* “In my sociology class my teacher welcomed my view on Islam and what I have to go through every day.”
* “Last year 3 Muslim students, 2 women wearing hijabs and one man with a beard, left USM.”
* “I love USM. Every one is fine to get along with. I feel welcomed in my classes but there are a few times I might have some problems.”
* “My anatomy teacher talked about immigrants and briefly explained to the class to try to put themselves in my shoes. And then she proceeded to say to me in front of the class, ‘clap for her being here.’”
* A Somali student said that the creation of a prayer/meditation room was a “big accomplishment and was really empowering”.

F. Issues Affecting Students with Disabilities
1. Incidents
* “I have PTSD and don’t want to talk about it. One professor said ‘what do you do?’ I answered, ‘I am disabled’. The professor responded ‘but what do you do?’”
* “I need 10 times more time to do tasks than most people. I don’t want to talk about my issues, much of which are internal, to my professors. OSSD tells me to email my professors but how do I describe my disability in an email.”
* “Most professors provide accommodations. But one professor said ‘no, I don’t think so’. That I had OSSD to help. My USM therapist volunteered to email my professor and told my professor all of my personal information. I was very upset.”
* “A professor refused to allow me to take 4 days off because of my disabilities and I had to drop the course.”
* “OSSD prepares letters to professors but often they arrive 2 or 3 weeks into the semester.”
“Professors do not order books early enough to give me enough time to have the books scanned and converted to a document that my voice reader can use. I have a vision impairment. So I sometimes do not get my books until 2 to 3 weeks into the semester. One professor added two texts after the course had started and I received the version for my reader very late.”

“I had to leave school on a temporary medical leave. I had a 3.78 GPA but my incompletes were turned into Fs and this reduced my GPA so I will not be able to get scholarships. I was planning and able to finish the work I missed.”

“A professor trying to give me an accommodation said ‘you don’t have to do the project.’ I don’t want favors.”

“I use a wheelchair and can’t get around tables and chairs to work in groups. This can leave me outside looking in. If teachers are going to require group work they should think about how they set the groups up.”

“I had a prof who was too accommodating and handed me my exam and said ‘take it anywhere you want for as long as you want.’”

“I don’t want to have conversations about my disability with my professors and as a result appear damaged.”

“An OSSD staff member tried to interpret my disability by comparing it to theirs and the result was to minimize mine.”

“I have a back problem and the desks and chairs in my classrooms are very old. OSSD said they could put a desk and chair into the room but that they could not guaranty that someone else would not take it. I then asked for the chair and they responded ‘well, I don’t know if we can do that.’”.

A student commented that she has ADHD and finds it hard to focus if the class is too loud and chaotic, such as when multiple small groups are working at the same time. She added that it would be helpful to have the school notify faculty of her disability so she doesn’t have to be the one to initiate the discussion.

“My most difficult situation was being overloaded.... Also due to the frantic pace of school I’m not absorbing information in a useful manner.”

“Last semester when I tried to inform one of my professors about my ADHD, I was literally laughed at. I don’t feel as though ADHD is a widely accepted disability and I will never forget the professor’s response. The impact I experienced was that I shut down in that class and failed because I was embarrassed and made to feel like saying I had ADHD was a cop out.”
* “One professor laughed at me when I said that I have difficulty with papers because of ADHD. I freeze up when I have too much going on.”
* A professor was notified by the University that the student needed someone to take notes for him. The professor asked for volunteers in class. The student, however, did not need or want someone to take notes.

2. Comments
* “The person I work with at OSSD is very nice and helpful. He really knows a lot and he has been very helpful to me. A lot of my professors have been helpful and accommodating.”
* “I may be one of the ‘chosen’. I have nothing but wonderful things to say about OSSD.”
* “OSSD minimizes psychological disabilities by giving me pep talks to try to convince me that I can get through these disabilities.”
* “My learning disabilities are easily misconstrued for apathy or laziness and that’s a difficult perception to overcome.”
* “One thing disability services could improve upon is facilitating between student and professor, so that the student does not have to reveal personal information to the professor nor have to go through hoops to advocate for herself. Please streamline the process so confidentiality of students is maintained and precious study time is not lost self-advocating. Also educate professors about OSSD and ADA.”
* “Too many steps for L.D. [learning disability] peeps!”
* “Accommodation policies should be incorporated into academic policies rather than solely being in OSSD policies. This creates an antagonistic and adversarial situation between students and OSSD on the one hand and professors on the other.”
* “My biggest academic barrier has been trying to study and stay caught up having ADHD.”
* “I had a horrendous experience using OSSD. If you don’t have a cookie cutter disability OSSD will not work for you. They are not good at helping with PTSD and stress.”
* “ADHD people need more time and get overloaded very quickly.”
* A student said that LAC has virtually no services for students with learning disabilities. The student also said he would like like transportation to the Portland campus. His disability income does not allow him to buy a car.
* Another LAC student with disabilities said that disability services are not user friendly. In order to receive disability services he would need to go
to Gorham and submit paper work to establish the disability. Then he would be required to approach each individual teacher to ask for accommodations. He added that it is hard for him to initiate conversations with all of his professors because he is uncomfortable labeling himself as disabled. He added ‘I don’t like to call attention to myself.’”
* “Communication from OSSD to professors is a problem.”
* “I haven’t found much that’s useful to me in support of ADHD.”
* “We need to advocate for ourselves and this is very time consuming.”
* “We need to explain to our professors what our disability is. It is humiliating.”
* Professors are permitted to flunk you if you miss more than 3 classes.”
* “OSSD is supposed to provide a letter to the professor. Sometimes, however, OSSD doesn’t write the accommodation into the letter.”
* Two students with disabilities complemented the services provided by the counseling office at USM.
* “I don’t want to reveal my disability to my notetaker. My PTSD, eating disorder, chronic bowel and Lymes disease. I want the notetakers to be anonymous.”
* “One thing USM does right is offering a Space Apart for students of all faiths to use for prayer and meditation. As a Buddhist who chants twice daily at home I do not need it for my daily practice but as a student with disabilities I am thankful for free counseling and when therapists are not available I took refuge at the Space Apart so I could handle my anxiety, stress and emotions through taking time out to chant. This was invaluable and I do not know how I could have gotten through those days without it.”

3. Recommendations from Students
* “All professors at USM need to know about students with disabilities and that students with disabilities will need accommodations.”
* “Fund an increase for additional staffing at OSSD, including a student advocate.”
* “Disability services overall need to be improved. Accommodations should be provided without that having to be a confrontational process. The Office of Support Services for Students with Disabilities should be more expedient in providing letters.... The University should have a policy accommodating students for absences from class.”
* “I would like to improve the policy regarding disability ... to allow them not to receive an ‘F’ grade when they have to be out of school for a period of
time to get better and then try to catch up with their incomplete courses.... Allow the students to complete the incomplete courses, especially when the student has support from the instructor.... This will ensure that the student with a high GPA would not be penalized for an illness and not be penalized in applying for future scholarships that help the student be able to go to school.”

G. Issues Affecting Students who are Veterans
1. Incidents
   None
2. Comments
   * “I was deployed for two weeks in September and missed a lot of important beginning semester classes. As a consequence, I am failing an online class this semester.”
   * The Vets Center is a key way to meet other student vets.
   * The Vets Center helps us connect with students and also to find and reconnect with military friends outside of Maine.
   * “I wouldn’t enjoy USM without the Center. Other students cannot comprehend our life in the military.”
   * “My advisor and several professors have been very supportive of my military duties and responsibilities, even to the point of waving prerequisites and such to get me the classes I need.”
   * “The verification officer for vets’ enrollment is very good.”
   * “Vets get stressed because there is less structure here than in the military.”
   * “Everyone who comes to the Center graduates.”
   * 20 to 25 vets regularly come to the Center. There are 350 USM students who receive veteran’s benefits.
   * The Center needs a paid coordinator.
   * The space for the Vet Center is good.
   * The retention rate for vets in U Maine schools is poor. The graduation rate for vets who use the Center is high.
3. Recommendations
* “We should have an informal program to help us find jobs, such as job shadowing.”
* Vets should have programs for dealing with stress.
* Vets could use help or a program on time management.
* USM should consider someone who volunteers for active duty the same way it treats those who are called up.
* Vets should be given priority registration. This is helpful in managing issues with disability and medication related appointments. UMA gives vets priority registration.
* Waive the application fee for vets. UMA does this.

B. Issues Affecting Students with Young Children
1. Incidents
None
2. Comments
* “Having a childcare option on campus would help me be able to attend evening classes.”
* “With the lack of childcare and the times the courses are offered, it has been difficult to (1) be here and be part of the school or campus community and (2) take certain classes I would have liked to take but were not offered at convenient times.”
* “After listening to this group I feel that daycare with flexible hours would be beneficial....”
* “A childcare center for parents would help both academically - in that I could spend more time and focus better knowing I have a dependable place to bring my child - and community wise in that I could meet other parents and have additional support as well as potential play groups during my free time.”
* “Classes ending at 4:30 so students can get to daycare by 5.”
* All of the 8 students in one focus group expressed the need for day care on campus. Some were parents and some were not.

B. Issues Affecting Students Needing Help With Writing
1. Incidents
None

2. Comments
* “The only barrier affecting my academic success would be the emphasis placed on writing. I understand the importance of quality writing skills and all the other benefits obtained from writing but I feel there is too much emphasis.”
* “I did not have good writing skills when I came to college and am still working on them.”
* “The Writing Center is a great service provided to ALL students.”
* “The campus is writing intensive. I understand that time management is part of the college experience. However, a happy medium given this campus’ demographics is needed. This semester with only three classes, I will have written 54 papers! Some, yes are shorter than others but we still have full time work, kids, partners, etc. to consider.”
* “Services that I find useful at USM are the writing center and blackboard.”
* “The biggest help to me in my experience here was my first semester where my teacher gave me much feedback on my papers and it helped me grow as a writer and become a successful student.”
* “The Writing Center at LAC made me feel good about myself when I needed their services for writing papers. One of the tutors was kind and patient. This was his gift. He went over and beyond his duty to help me achieve in writing papers due to my disability.”

J. Students Needing Financial Aid

1. Incidents
* “I had trouble with my financial aid. I’m a first generation college student - financial aid confuses me - I just didn’t know what I was doing. When I went for help, she seemed annoyed that I needed to be walked through how to choose my financial aid. She wasn’t very helpful; she gave me the ‘tools’ and sent me away. I felt stupid like I should have known this, like its part of being a successful student.... I received my financial aid two months late and struggled to get my books.”
* “The financial aid office mailed my refund to the wrong address and ... no one was willing to sit down with me and show me how to correct my address. I finally got the situation remedied but it took almost a month and it really messed with my finances as I had juggled and shifted money to pay for books and fees.”
* “I lost my financial aid because my advisor did not give me enough information.”

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2. Comments
* “I almost dropped out of school because juggling registering and financial aid was too confusing and the school expects you to know what to do and are of little help.”
* “There is no meaningful help with financial aid.”

IV. Recommendations from Steve Wessler Based on Information Provided by Students in the Focus Groups

This part of the report sets forth Steve Wessler’s recommendation for improving the effectiveness of diversity services at USM.

**Recommendation #1:** Provide faculty with an annual mandatory educational session on the needs of diverse students. These sessions should include information about the needs of particular groups, strategies for making students from different groups feel welcomed in the classroom, and strategies for addressing inappropriate comments or stereotypes by students.

**Comments:** The focus groups reveal two vastly different pictures of faculty. Many students discussed how their happiness and academic success was due to the remarkable care of faculty. Some of these comments are set forth in Part III above. Others are below:
* “I have found that the professors in ... [my] department have been exceptionally good at dealing with accommodations and I appreciate that tremendously. It helps that there is a progressive perspective in regard to diversity.”
* “A sociology professor really helped me more than I could have done...She helped me more than just as a professor, she tutored me and went over my writing and so on.”
* Four students in a focus group said they had teachers who had “bent over backwards to help them”.
* “The most helpful service for me has been the understanding from most teachers. Because I work full time, third shift, it is often necessary for my work to be late. The teachers have been most gracious in accepting it.”
* “The understanding of many of the professors of non-traditional students that let late assignments and re-writes or re-takes be accepted.
* “The most successful part of my experience at USM/LAC would be the professors and their ability to treat people as individuals.... Each professor has always listened, respected and not judged. They’ve always
been willing to assist me to succeed in any way they can. I appreciate this very much.”
* “Faculty members go above and beyond their way to help with any problem I run into related to my schooling.... All science teachers are people I am able to talk to anytime.”
* “I have a professor who is always very positive in her feedback and emails. Even though it is a writing intensive class, she provides feedback for revisions that help make all my writing that much better.”
* “Professors are approachable and I’m not intimidated.”

Students participating in the focus groups, however, recounted many examples described in this report in which professors were insensitive to the needs of students or made rude or inappropriate comments to students from diverse groups. While these professors represent a minority of the USM faculty the negative impact of their conduct resonates widely and is highly destructive to students.

The annual educational sessions on the needs of diverse groups of students will be helpful to all faculty members. These sessions are essential, however, for those faculty who lack critical knowledge about and strategies for meeting the needs of these students.

**Recommendation #2:** Require the cafeterias at USM to (1) label all food containing pork and (2) post a sign if non-pork products are prepared in such a way that the food comes into contact with utensils, equipment or cooking surfaces that have been in contact with pork, without first being cleaned.

**Comments:** Muslim students expressed concern that they cannot tell which foods contain pork. They also were concerned that some non-pork food is prepared in a way that it came into contact with surfaces, equipment or oil used in the cooking of pork.

**Recommendation #3:** Create two prayer spaces on the Portland campus in the most frequently used classrooms buildings.

**Comments:** Muslim students expressed concern that the current prayer/meditation location is too far from the cluster of classroom buildings on the Portland campus. This makes it difficult to leave class and pray
without missing significant time from walking to and from the existing prayer room.

**Recommendation #4:** Provide a child care/day care facility on the Portland and Lewiston campuses.

**Comments:** Students, both parents and non-parents, described the importance of having day care on campus. Day care reduces anxiety and stress for student parents and allows them to take classes they otherwise would not be able to enroll in.

**Recommendation #5:** Examine whether students are receiving sufficient assistance in applying for financial aid and increase the availability of that assistance if warranted.

**Comment:** Students described difficulty in learning about financial aid and in applying for that aid. Ensuring that students receive assistance in applying for aid is important both for students and USM. If students do not received aid they may be forced to withdraw from the University.

**Recommendation #6:** Examine with the students who use the Veterans Resource Center whether increased programming for veterans and national guard members is needed. Similarly the University should examine whether priority registration for classes for veterans and members of the national guard would assist veterans in scheduling both their academic schedule and their services related to health care issues.

**Comment:** Veterans appear to be a group that has a low rate of retention. These recommendations are aimed at ensuring that veterans receive those services that will help them succeed at and finish their studies at USM.

**Recommendation #7:** Provide faculty with a mandatory annual educational session on addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

**Comment:** Students with disabilities described incidents in which faculty did not understand the rights of disabled student. The laws and regulations on protecting the rights of disabled students are complicated. Moreover, these laws and regulations change from time to time. Faculty (and students) will benefit for receiving annual presentations both on the rights
of disabled students and the responsibilities of faculty in protecting those rights.

**Recommendation #8:** Evaluate whether OSSD needs increased staff to meet the needs of students.

**Comment:** Students with disabilities described delays in OSSD sending letters to faculty describing needed accommodations. For some students these letters arrive 2 or 3 after the beginning of the semester. OSSD over the past 10 years has seen an increase in the number of students served annually from 150 to 400. In the same time period the number of FTE professional staff working with students has decreased from 2 to 1 1/2.

**Recommendation #9:** Examine the need to change two policies: first, the policy that requires an incomplete grade to be changed to a failing grade after a certain period of time, even when the student has been granted extended time to complete the course requirements as an accommodation and, second, the policy that permits professors to fail a student who has missed more than 3 classes, when those missed classes are due to students’ disabilities.

**Comment:** Both of these policies have the unintended affect of erecting significant barriers to the academic success of students with disabilities.

V. Concluding Comments from Steve Wessler

The process of speaking with students in focus groups was rewarding. In each of the focus groups the students were focused, articulate and thoughtful. The University has reason to be proud of these students whose experiences and comments provided the information on which this report is based.

The recommendations from Steve Wessler in Part IV are important to ensuring that diversity services are effective and that students do not face unnecessary barriers to their academic success at USM. Recommendations #1 and #7 are particularly important. USM has a wonderful faculty. These individuals reach out in many ways to make the experiences of students from diverse communities as positive as possible. However, a minority of faculty members do not appear to have the
knowledge, skills or strategies to ensure the academic success of their diverse students. Some of these faculty, without intending to do so, erect significant, and in some instances insurmountable barriers to that success. These barriers can be significantly reduced by providing annual educational sessions to all faculty members. Recommendations #1 and #7 are critically important to the ability of students from diverse groups to succeed academically.