STUDENT SUCCESS TASK FORCE

NAVIGATING THE UNIVERSITY SUBCOMMITTEE

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Overview

The Student Success Task Force (SSTF) working group for Navigating the University concentrated on improving the following areas of our campus:

(a) student access to information and services;
(b) employee morale and employee training; and
(c) providing a welcoming environment through better communication and on-campus enhancements.

Key Issues

Based on members’ experience and knowledge, sub-committees were formed to focus on the key issues identified during discussion:

1. Beautification/signage/hospitality
   (Visual appearance – online and on-ground)
2. Morale (recognition, transparency, etc.)
3. Customer service (training, policies and procedures)
4. Student/campus activities/involvement
5. Technology (Apps, Alerts, etc.)

We chose to concentrate on issues that kept resurfacing during our discussions. The majority of our committee members had either previous direct experience with these issues or had knowledge of others who had expressed concern about them.

During the SSTF committee meetings, the chairpersons for this sub-group noted that some of the issues under discussion overlapped with other subgroups such as Access & Affordability and Pre-Campus Experience & Readiness. Due to time constraints, we were not able to collaborate with these other working groups, but we hope that the reader will be able to identify the areas of similarity.

Recommendations

Short Term Recommendations

1. Ease of access to information addressing how to navigate the campus has proven to be an issue for staff, students and visitors. Surprisingly, there are many staff members and students who are not able to locate North or West Campus, along with numerous office locations. Most students’ first visit to campus includes a guided tour, but this certainly does not guarantee that they will retain the information. Visitors are easily confused upon entering campus, as many areas lack signage or have signage that needs updating to reflect recent construction. Recommended steps to address this issue include:
• Establishing an Information Center/Area in the academic heart of campus (similar to the One-Stop desk in the Wintergreen Building). The suggested location from the workgroup is the Engleman Hall Rotunda. Campus clubs and organizations could take turns manning the desk, giving them the opportunity to both advertise their events and activities and provide customer service. Work Study students and Student Workers could also be hired to assist in this role.

• Create Quick Response (QR) Codes that students could scan from various campus locations, providing a link to an online map of the campus.

• Update current maps and signage, particularly the large free-standing directional signs along Fitch Street. Additional signage should be provided for buildings that are not clearly visible from the street, such as Davis Hall or the Nursing Classroom Building.

• Provide a free app for smartphones with a variety of information, maps and a scaled-down version of the campus website – note, this is currently under development by the Office of Public Affairs.

• Each building should have a map or room numbers near major entrances, similar to those in Buley Library and the Student Center.
  o The legend should identify, if applicable:
    ▪ Classroom
    ▪ Computer room
    ▪ Study room
    ▪ Office

2. Customer Service/Service Level concerns are widespread across the campus community. Our group examined this topic from a variety of vantage points – student/parent, visitor, and faculty/staff. The customer should receive the same level of service whether it was face-to-face, by telephone or electronic. Non-verbal communication was also taken into consideration – what message is your body language sending to the customer?

The group strongly believes that the university should devote more resources to across-the-board customer service training. This type of training would ensure that everyone who interacts with students directly knows what is expected of them, so that students and visitors to campus would receive consistent information. It is important that employees know their job well and be aware of the basic functions of other departments and offices on campus.

The Customer Service Working Group held a training session in March 2013 for certain departments and an accompanying flyer was created stating that “THE STUDENT IS ... deserving of assistance with courtesy, kindness, and patience. We are doing an important job, but we are not doing them a favor. ...the reason we are here.”
This is an excellent summation of our responsibility as employees at Southern. Our group felt that this flyer should have been circulated across campus and placed at each and every workstation, from top-level administration through facilities staff. All of us have a collective responsibility to serve our students in the most helpful, efficient and customer-friendly environment possible.

New employees routinely begin their employment on campus without a formal, welcoming orientation from the appropriate offices. Although there is a new-faculty orientation, similar programs for staff members are not routinely provided by human resources, or their respective unions or departments. There are no set policies and procedures in place aimed at acclimating a new employee to Southern or to the field of higher education. Orientation to Southern should be open to all employees (new, returning and current) and could be undertaken on a three-month cycle.

University policies and procedures change every year and those employees who were hired five to 10 years ago have no way to keep current with changes in policies and procedures as well as the laws pertaining to students and higher education and students. We believe it would help employees if there were a refresher session every three to five years.

The Career Services office used to conduct an orientation workshop for all supervisors of Student Workers. This should be revived. Human Resources could partner with Career Services to model a similar workshop for full-time staff with a special concentration on customer service at Southern.

Discussions are currently being held with a view to resuming the new-hire orientation that was last conducted several years ago. Note – *this orientation has been re-instituted.* It included several hour-long sessions at which representatives of various departments met with the group of new hires to introduce them to the university. The PowerPoint that was used at that time is attached and could provide the basis for an updated workshop developed by human resources.

3. Employee morale has been on a decline for many years. Employees feel that they are not valued, in particular, clerical workers & maintenance staff. These employees mingle with students every day - in the hallways, the parking lots and the residence halls, therefore lifting and maintaining their morale is key.

The recent pattern of leadership turn over at Southern has left many staff members bewildered. Asked if the staff has a connection/good working relationship with the administration, a response from one member of our group was: “it could be better but why push it, they don’t stay here long anyway.” Longevity begets loyalty.

More employee recognition, office visits from the University President and members of the senior administration and enhanced supervisor training will all enhance morale and in turn, improve customer service.
Long Term Recommendations

Operating hours and technology are the key focus of this group’s long-term recommendations.

1. Campus support offices should be open at non-traditional times (i.e. evening/night).
   - Explore the possibility of graduate assistants or students working non-traditional office hours to supplement staff (this also creates on-campus jobs for student). Creating student jobs during after-class hours or on weekends would also benefit students, who often have to get jobs off campus at night and on the weekends. This would mitigate the need for off-campus transportation and also keep more students active on campus.
   - A position with the title of “student concierge” or “ombudsman” would be a valuable means of disseminating information to students and helping them have their questions answered and issues resolved. Students often have difficulty identifying the right department to find information, and the ombudsman position would help ensure that they are not bounced from department to department to find the answer that they are seeking.

2. Signage – Replace old signage with new electronic signs that scroll and are easy to update. While this might be seen as an expensive outlay initially, over time the equipment will pay for itself as there would be no need to reprint, order new signage, or use manpower to repaint/reinstall new signs when rooms and buildings are re-designated. In some locations on campus there are handmade signs that have been taped to the walls for rooms that are difficult to find. These signs are indicative of locations where permanent signs should be considered.

3. Develop “Live Chats” in key student service areas such as Admissions. Live chats would require hiring student workers to respond to online visitors who may have questions about the University. If we can engage interested students and their parents when they visit our website we can at the same time expound on the merits of applying to Southern.

4. Introduce a texting process for students to ask questions to selected student services offices, similar to the Text A Librarian, or the One-Stop desk. Each text would be routed to an email or desktop to person(s) assigned to the response hub. The response could be as simple as responding with the web address where the inquirer would find the information they were looking for, or a phone number for the department/area they are seeking.

Supporting Documentation
Student Testimony (group members)
Faculty/Staff Experiences (group members)
PowerPoint (Human Resources)
Questionnaire Responses (students & staff)