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Characteristics, Involvement and Behaviors of Academically Successful, Engaged and Satisfied Western Michigan University Undergraduates

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Characteristics, Involvement and Behaviors of Academically Successful, Engaged and Satisfied Western Michigan University Undergraduates

Anne Lundquist, doctoral associate, Student Affairs

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT
The purpose of this research project is to understand the characteristics, involvement and behaviors of academically successful, engaged and satisfied Western Michigan University undergraduate students in order to allow the Division of Student Affairs (and its various departments) to develop appropriate student learning outcomes in keeping with the mission and strategic goals of the University.

SURVEY METHOD
The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) measures the importance students place on various services, programs and experiences in relationship to the relative degree of satisfaction that results from their interactions with them. The SSI provides results on 12 scales and categorizes students’ satisfaction as well as the relative importance they place on: Academic Advising, Campus Climate, Campus Support Services, Concern for the Individual, Instructional Effectiveness, Admissions and Financial Aid, Registration, Respectfulness to Diverse Populations, Safety and Security, Service Excellence, Student Centeredness and Campus Life.

The SSI survey was administered online between February 27th and March 16th to a random sample of 2000 undergraduate students currently enrolled in 12 or more credit hours. 322 (16%) students completed the survey.

RESULTS

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Demographics of Students Completing the Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE SSI INSTRUMENT
The Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) was developed by Dr. Laurie A. Schneider and Dr. Stephanie L. Juijifer. The SSI was piloted in 1993 and implemented in 1994. As of 2011, 2,550 institutions and over 4.4 million students have completed the survey.

The instrument shows high internal reliability. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha is .97 for the set of importance scores and is .98 for the set of satisfaction scores. The three-week, test-retest reliability coefficient is .85 for importance scores and .84 for satisfaction scores.

Convergent validity was assessed by correlating satisfaction scores from the SSI with satisfaction scores from the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSSQ), another statistically reliable satisfaction instrument. The Pearson correlation between these two instruments (r = .71; p < .00001) is high enough to indicate that the SSI’s satisfaction scores measure the same satisfaction construct as the CSSQ’s, yet low enough to show distinct differences between the instruments.

To date, Student Affairs has concentrated assessment efforts on student satisfaction and tracking/usage, mostly at the departmental level. The goal for 2011-2012 is to enhance and clarify the division’s Strategic Plan through the creation of specific strategies linked to divisional goals and objectives and to concentrate efforts on the creation of student learning outcomes as a significant part of those strategies.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

- WMU students are more satisfied (at a statistically significant level on all 12 scales) with their undergraduate experience than their peers at other national four-year public institutions.
- 62% of WMU students are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their overall WMU experience vs. 54% at peer institutions.
- 69% of WMU undergraduates would “definitely” or “probably” choose WMU again vs. 60% at peer institutions.
- The WMU strengths seem to paint a picture of a caring, safe, helpful, well-maintained, welcoming campus environment with academic excellence and a good reputation.
- The challenges appear to paint a picture of an institution that could improve on certain processes and procedures for students.
- WMU has higher satisfaction than its peers in some key areas that don’t necessarily show up in the strengths column (such as unbiased faculty, caring staff, resources in career services, academic support services, counseling, and reasonable assessment procedures).

NEXT STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Share data and results with other campus areas for their review and use.
2. Use raw data for further statistical analysis.
3. Discuss results with Student Affairs Leadership Team.
4. Leadership Team members will use results for further divisional strategic planning as well as to assist in setting departmental goals and priorities.
5. Conduct follow up Focus Groups (see below).
6. Use Focus Group results for further strategic planning.

FOCUS GROUPS

Interview Successful WMU Students About Their Experience

The sample for step two of this project will be a sample of undergraduate students who meet the following criteria:

- 3.25 (or above) GPA
- Junior (or above) academic status
- Involved in 3 or more campus activities or programs (such as a club or organization, greek life, community service or volunteerism, student employment, internship, etc.)
- No more than 1 disciplinary violation of the Student Conduct Code
- Other appropriate criteria as determined by the Student Affairs Assessment Committee

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the students in order to gain more detailed demographic information as well as understand each student’s:

- Self-reported identity
- Level of involvement and satisfaction with campus activities and services
- Knowledge of various support services, and
- WMU experience

Interview questions will follow up on some of the items on the SSI and NSSE, asking students to expand on the data and results and provide explanatory information to the interviewer from their point of view.