UPDATE ACTION PROJECT

Resources for Graduate and Undergraduate Students

1. Describe the past year’s accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

During the 2010-2011 academic year, Concordia established the Office of Multicultural Student Engagement (OMSE) and hired a full-time director (Laila I. McCloud). The OMSE was charged with creating programs that engage all Concordia students around issues of diversity and equity. Six different events are planned for the fall semester. Some examples include: DIVERSECity Tour - Paseo Boricua; Dessert and Dialogue – And Justice for All? Exploring Cultural Inequality, Power, Privilege and Oppression; and Student Diversity Leadership Conference.

After reviewing our current programs and areas of need (undergraduate first generation and under-represented student populations) the STARS (Students Together are Reaching Success) Peer Mentor program was designed and implemented August 2011. This program pairs first year students (new and transfer) who identify as first generation college students (neither parent has completed a four year degree) and/or students of color (African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino and Native American) with upperclassmen for the academic year. The mentors are charged with connecting with their mentees on a weekly basis in addition to creating monthly programs that address academic, social, and cultural needs. We currently have 175 mentees assigned to 11 mentors.

As a result of a year-and-a-half university Strategic Enrollment Planning (SEP) process, the position of Assistant Vice President for Academics: Student Success was established. The Assistant VP for Student Success is collecting persistence data on all our undergraduate students and identifying reasons why students are leaving. First generation, certain athletes, and under-represented population students have lower retention rates than other student populations. Additional resources and other processes are being discussed for implementation by the Committee on Students Success and the SEP-I team (implementation team).

For the graduate students, new online programs were implemented during the last few years and have highlighted an area of great need. Graduate students consistently give feedback that they need support and resources in the area of technology. Two additional staff positions were filled in the Instructional Design and Technology team (IDT) but much of their time is devoted to supporting faculty in the design and implementation of online courses. New processes and /or programs need to be identified and implemented to support the graduate students.

2. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

The Committee on Student Success, Student Services, the Strategic Enrollment Planning Steering Committee and its associated work groups, and three Vice Presidents (VP for Student Life and Leadership Services, Enrollment and Marketing, and Planning and
Research) worked together to develop new resources and programs for the undergraduate students. The various committees and units are composed of faculty and staff that many times do not get to work with one another. Key faculty and staff personnel were identified based on their interaction with students and knowledge of Concordia’s challenges.

For the graduate students, faculty and staff that are part of the College of Graduate and Innovative Programs and the Instructional Design and Technology Team have been involved in assessing the current resources and identifying new technology support needed.

3. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.
For our graduate students, technology resources and support services need to be identified, established/designed, and implemented. Feedback from the graduate students must be collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the new resources and support.

For our undergraduate students, assessment of the new programs and resources available for the students this year needs to be conducted. Data for key performance indicators will be collected by the new director of Institutional Research and used by the Assistant VP for Academics: Student Success, the Committee on Students Success and the SEP-I team to implement high priority action plans for the university focusing on resources and support for undergraduate students (especially first generation and under-represented student populations).

4. Describe any “effective practice(s)” that resulted from your work on this Action Project.
Changes in the undergraduate registration process were implemented during the 2010-2011 academic year. Registration was moved up by an entire month (moved from mid-April to the beginning of March) to help students establish their financial plans and therefore spread their monthly loan payments over more months (and reduce their monthly payments). The Committee on Student Success devised a process for weekly reviewing “at risk” students and a follow-up procedure for contacting students that did not register in March for the next academic year. The result was an increase in the percentage of students that were registered for the next academic year before the summer break.

5. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?
Identifying effective resources and technology support for the graduate students is still an existing challenge for the university. With so many of our graduate students taking courses at off-campus sites or completely online, our direct contact with the students is limited.

For our undergraduate students the summer break still poses a challenge for the university (determined September 2011 with census data collected indicating retention for fall 2010 to fall 2011). We need to find consistent processes and resources for staying
in contact with our students and offering them additional support during the summer months.