EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Ad Hoc Committee for Student Development Review ’04–’05

Introduction

The Ad Hoc Committee for Student Development Review was charged by Orange County Community College’s Executive Committee of Governance to: (a) review and update the mission statement for Student Development overall, tying in the College’s Vision/Mission/Values statements, as well as related mission statements for the areas of Admissions and Enrollment Management, Academic and Program Advising, and Student Success/Retention; (b) review the processes, methods, and structure used by Student Development to deliver key services to students, especially in the areas of enrollment management, academic and program advising, and student success and retention; (c) make recommendations to address Middle States findings.

In reviewing the mission of the Student Development Division, the committee found it to be basically sound and decided the committee was not the best body to determine if the current mission of the division should be further updated. However, the committee in its subsequent interviews discovered that the various departments within Student Development did not have or did not publicize true mission statements. This deficiency should be addressed by divisional leadership.

The Ad Hoc Committee met from the middle of September 2004 through March 2005, dividing itself into three sub-committees to focus on the areas identified in the charge above. Each sub-committee then produced a report of its findings and recommendations from which the following is summarized. The committee acknowledges that there are areas of the division that currently work well, however, it decided to narrow the focus of its findings on the areas where significant improvements would benefit the division, the student population, and the college.

The findings of the committee are consistent with many of the issues and recommendations identified by the 2004 Middle States Report and past committees (referenced in the individual sub-committee reports).

College administration, in concert with the Student Development Division, needs to implement the specific recommendations pertaining to divisional leadership, communication, structure and function (including staffing, space, and technology needs) as well as outcomes assessment.

Leadership:

Effective divisional leadership must be the foremost goal of the college administration. The need for strengthening the current divisional leadership was strongly noted in numerous interviews and written responses the committee received.

Divisional leadership must be responsible for revitalizing morale; improving communication and teamwork throughout the division; ensuring each area has appropriate mission, values, and goal statements; and advocating for divisional needs. College administration should take the necessary steps to increase and strengthen the effectiveness and advocacy skills of divisional leadership.

Communication:

The absence of good communication in the division needs to be addressed. Feedback received by all three sub-committees indicated that the flow of important information is not coming from the divisional leadership nor is important information from divisional membership being received by the leadership of the division.
Communication in the Student Development Division needs to be strengthened among colleagues, between staff and students, and with other areas of the college, particularly Academic Affairs. Divisional meetings requiring the attendance of the entire division should be reinstated to allow for communication lines to be re-established and to encourage members to freely discuss concerns and brainstorm ways to help resolve problems. All personnel should attend mandatory workshops in conflict resolution, team building, customer service, civility in the workplace, and developing positive oral and written communication skills.

To improve collaboration between Student Development and Academic Affairs, workshops should be held on a semi-annual basis to keep Academic Advisors informed of new courses, programs, and college events. In addition, faculty support is needed to ensure the success of New Student Orientation.

**Function and Structure:**

The current structure of the Student Development division does not appear to be the result of a careful analysis of the mission of the Division, needs of the student population, or services provided.

Develop and implement a structure that will lead to the most effective means of providing enrollment management, advising, and student success/retention services utilizing both conventional and alternative delivery systems. This plan should include the most efficient reporting structure that will optimize decision-making and communication throughout the areas providing these services.

In accomplishing the above, the committee recognizes resources will be required in the following areas:

**Staffing**

Staffing needs throughout the Student Development Division and the Newburgh Extension Center must be reviewed and evaluated to identify shortages and to ensure services are effectively delivered. In doing this evaluation, job descriptions should be reviewed, created, and upgraded where necessary.

While acknowledging that staffing shortages exist across the division in multiple areas, positions that should be filled immediately are the leadership position in Counseling and Advising and a new position at the Newburgh Extension Center to oversee daily operations of Student Development services. Individuals hired should be given the authority and accountability to carry out the functions of their positions.

**Space**

A review of the physical layout and space utilization of the Student Development Division needs to be done and a plan developed and implemented to address issues this committee found in doing its research. These issues include ensuring a positive public image, addressing privacy concerns, maximizing workflow, and significantly reducing student runaround. This plan should have two components. The first component should include what can be done now to address these issues for the immediate future in light of current budgetary constraints and the second component should address long-range plans to redesign the Commons in conjunction with the Facilities’ Master Plan.

**Technology**

Administration needs to address technology deficits throughout the Division. In development of a technology plan for the division, information already collected by the Student Development Technology Advisory Group and the survey recently done by the IT Department should be referenced.
Specific examples (not all Student Development Division related) of technology initiatives that are needed to improve services in academic and program advising; enrollment management; and student success and retention include, but are not limited to: computerization of the writing part of the assessment, automated phone systems, degree audit, web registration, scheduling software, tracking software, automated financial aid packaging, document imaging, a comprehensive student information system, a divisional color printer and folding machine, on-line advisement capabilities, e-mail advisement capabilities, an advising chat room, an advising web-site with FAQs (frequently asked questions), and in-depth program information available to students via the web-site or CD-ROM.

Once the needs assessment and technology plan are developed, it must be implemented and integrated throughout the college community. A key component of the integration should be training campus-wide on these technology initiatives. Lastly, a plan for outcomes assessment should be developed and implemented to determine that student needs are being met.

Outcomes Assessment:

The various areas within Student Development should work with the new Coordinator of Assessment to develop appropriate assessment methods and practices to: 1) identify and measure key performance indicators; 2) obtain and utilize student feedback; and 3) identify the baseline quality of our current services and establish the benchmark of where we and our students believe these services should be.

Conclusion

After an intensive review by this committee our membership respectfully submits this Executive Summary. We urge college administration to address the problems as outlined and actively work toward resolutions that will enhance the overall experience of our students and improve the working environment of the Student Development Division.

The committee strongly believes the Student Development Division cannot fulfill its mission in a professional, coordinated, and effective manner unless these identified issues are addressed and the recommendations acted upon.

In addition to this Executive Summary, the committee further recommends the individual sub-committee reports be examined prior to implementing any changes.

Committee Members: Rosemary Barrett, Paul Broadie, Peter Cutty, Dyanna Dunlevy (student), Neil Foley (Chair), Patricia Guallini, JoAnn Hamburg, Steve Harpst, Maryanna Hudak, Nona Lavorgna (Chair, Sub-Committee Student Success and Retention), Kirk Manning (ex-officio), Christina Northrip (student, Fall semester), Gary Pavek, Michael Roe (Chair, Sub-Committee Academic and Program Advising), Ken Sincerbox (student), Karen Stephens, Margot St. Lawrence, Michelle Tubbs (Chair, Sub-Committee Enrollment Management), Terri VanEveren
Academic and Program Advising Sub-Committee Report

Statement of the Charge to this Sub-Committee
The sub-committee’s charge was to review the process, methods, and structure used by Student Development to deliver key services to students in the area of academic and program advising and to make recommendations to address Middle States findings related to this area as well as to identify issues discovered during this review.

Statement of Issues and Concerns
The effectiveness of the Academic and Program Advising system at Orange County Community College has been in question for many years. The most significant questions that arise concern supervision of the system of academic advising, advisor preparation and support, advisor accountability, and the use of technology.

Although the College has often visited the issue, little has actually been done to solve the problem. Concerns regarding Advising first surfaced in 1993 during a Middle States Accreditation visit. As a result of this visit, advising was listed as one of four major areas of concern that the college was asked to address. The recommendation in 1993 stated that “an accountable student advising system needed to be developed for the institution.” Since that report, several attempts have been made to correct this problem. In 1998, an Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Advising was established and reported findings and recommendations, some of which were acted upon. There was also a Faculty Workshop dedicated to Student Advisement in August of 1999 that brought to light several ideas covering this topic. In 2003, in preparation for an upcoming Middle States Accreditation Process, Interim President Meyers assigned the sole responsibility of student advisement to the Student Development Division. Academic Advising had previously been shared with Academic Affairs.

Advisement was also addressed in the 2004 Middle States On-Site Evaluation Team Report as a concern. The report stated the following:
“The college needs to finalize plans for advisement and counseling. In the process, input from the various constituencies should be sought and the plans should be implemented. A mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of the impending advising system should be included in the plans.”

Steps Taken to Conduct Review and Meet the Charge
- Reviewed 2004 Middle States On-Site Evaluation Team Report
- Reviewed 2004 Middle States Institutional Self-Study Report
- Reviewed Fall 2002 Student Satisfaction Survey
- Reviewed April 1998 Ad Hoc Committee on Advising Report to Executive Committee/College Assembly
- Reviewed Summary of Advising Strategies created at the 1999 SUNY Orange Faculty Workshop on Advising
- Reviewed “Background and References on Developmental Advising and Advising Models”, compiled by Lynne Johns, Office of Instructional Support Services and Retention, Hudson Valley Community College
- Developed a “working definition” of academic and program advising
- Referred to two separate Student Development Organizational Charts (one prepared by Student Development Division, one prepared by P. Cutty for committee)
- Referred to Academic Advising Assignments (10/04) prepared for committee by S. Sheehan
Interviewed 18 faculty and staff “key players” in current Advising System from various areas of campus. Interviewed 6 students from various academic backgrounds.

Sent voluntary survey to all members of the Student Development Division. Reviewed four returned Student Development staff surveys.

Observations and Committee Findings
Before addressing our committee findings, a working definition of Academic Advising had to be established. We came up with the following definition of what academic advising should be at Orange:

Academic Advising is the planned, organized system of providing accurate and up-to-date information about Orange County Community College, its programs, classes, resources, policies and procedures to current students, prospective students, parents, the college community, and other constituent communities. Successful academic advising provides our constituents with information and assistance to enable them to: make effective use of the college’s resources; make informed decisions in pursuing their college/career goals; and to be able to efficiently navigate their way inter/intra departmentally, divisionally and programmatically.

Academic Advising includes information and guidance about admission, program offerings, career paths, scheduling, and classes. Advisors should also be able to provide accurate referrals in regard to relevant matters such as financial aid and support services.

Using this as our framework, we have discovered, as have previous studies, that when advising works well it is in areas with well-defined audiences (eg. Health Professions). However, beyond those areas, there are particular problem areas (listed in priority order):

1. **Lack of Accountable Person in Charge:** Within the organizational structure of the Student Development Division, the responsibility of managing the Academic Advisement system lies with the Assistant Vice-President for Student Affairs. There is also a Coordinator of Counseling and Advisement position that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Counseling Center and advisement system. This coordinator position has been vacant for two years, leaving a large burden of responsibility and management oversight with the Assistant Vice President. There is currently a clear lack of coordination of academic advising.

2. **Lack of a Formal System or Structure with Oversight and Evaluation:** Currently, whether student advisement is successful or not depends primarily on the individual advisor since there is no clearly defined structure in place. Some advisors take their advising role seriously while others do not. Without an accountable supervisor for the program, there cannot be any qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the process or individual advisors.

3. **Lack of Training/Lack of Clear Definition of Advising and the Advisor’s Role:** Each advisor has her own definition of successful advising, ranging from a session that includes discussion of career and life goals, to handing a student a blank card and letting the student fill in his own classes. The College does not have a true standard for what the role of an advisor entails. In addition, those advisors who do have an accurate sense of their role are not sufficiently trained nor provided updates when program or course information is modified.

4. **Lack of Current Updated Information (Communication):** An effective communication system is essential at Orange as current programs constantly evolve, new programs arrive, courses are updated, and academic policy is revised. The College does not
currently have a mechanism for efficiently disseminating this new information to all advisors in a timely manner.

5. **Lack of Advisor Accessibility:**
The current system of advisor assignment is based on curriculum. Advisor contact information is not provided on the student’s initial advisor assignment letter. Issues such as an incompatibility between student and advisor locations (Middletown vs. Newburgh) and schedules (e.g., day vs. evening) exist. There is a lack of advisor availability in Newburgh year round. Additionally, there is a lack of advisor availability during peak-times (January, July, August).

6. **Lack of Appropriate Technology:**
The 1998 Ad Hoc Committee on Advising recommended the addition of PC’s for advisors in addition to implementation of a computerized degree audit system. While access to computers has improved, the degree audit/pre-requisite check system has still not been implemented, wasting prodigious amounts of advisor time. The current RISC system is cumbersome and not user-friendly.

**Recommendations (In priority order):**
The following are our committee’s recommendations based upon our research and college-wide surveys. Many thoughtful recommendations for revising the Academic Advising Program have been made throughout the years and we have incorporated them into our recommendations.

1. **Have an Accountable Person in Charge of the Academic Advising System:**
   Although the sole responsibility of Academic Advising lies within Student Development, there is no one who is presently assigned to handle the day-to-day operations of the program. The College, therefore, needs to identify or hire someone with the proper authority whose primary responsibility is the ongoing leadership and oversight of the process of academic advisement and who is accountable for the outcomes. This person’s job responsibilities and position in the overall college structure must be clearly defined. The Advising system at Orange cannot possibly be improved without a person dedicated solely to this responsibility.
   **Deadline: No later than August 2005**

2. **Create a Formal System or Structure with Oversight and Evaluation:**
   Assign the accountable person the task of overseeing the creation of a functional academic advising plan. The committee acknowledges that there are a variety of ways to redesign this system. Whichever plan is selected, we strongly recommend that this person consider the following in the creation of this plan:
   - Separate program advisement from the registration process so advisement can take place throughout the semester as an ongoing process culminating in the registration process. Doing this would provide advisors with more time to thoughtfully speak with and advise the student.
   - Closely involve Academic Divisions.
   - Develop a clear process to assist students with the creation of their schedule, (choosing actual class days and times). This could be done through the use of “scheduling assistants” (possibly work-study students) or the improvement of technology.
   - Make a plan that works for all students regardless of location (Middletown or Newburgh) or class schedules (day or evening).
• Create a continuously evolving model with specific areas of accountability. This model may need to change or be slightly altered based on the time of year (i.e. January, July, and August).
• Consider a system that recognizes differing levels of student advising need.
• Hold everyone with advising duties accountable for meeting their responsibilities.
• Consider recognizing expertise and strengths of advisors in determining their advising role.

One Advising Model that appeared often in our research and was often discussed was that of an Advising Center. Advising professionals could specialize in an academic division where they focus their advising load only on students in programs within that division. In addition to the advisors, we could have faculty members from each division available from 8am-8pm every week throughout each semester (e.g., Monday - Business/Math/Technology/Science; Tuesday - Health Professions, Wednesday – Liberal Arts). This model would try to incorporate the most committed and capable faculty members to staff the advisement center.

**Deadlines:**

- **Draft Proposal of Advising Plan:** January 2006
- **Implementation of Plan:** March 2006
- **Assessment of Plan Success:** October 2007

3. **Provide Extensive Advisor Training including a Definition of the Advisor’s Role:** Regardless of the advising system, training must be ongoing. Appropriate training must include at minimum:

• Information regarding procedures, technology, and college policy
• Clear standards for accurate and effective advising as stated in the above definition of academic advising
• Distribution of an advisor handbook and template outlining the necessary components of a successful advising session
• Program Specific Degree Audit Worksheets including pre-requisite and other critical information

4. **Increase Effective Communication:** Advisors must be equipped with the most accurate and comprehensive information to successfully advise and guide their students. Information regarding new courses, programs, and college events should be disseminated to advisors promptly. Other communication related suggestions include:

• Semi-annual advisor updates and more inclusive workshops as necessary
• Earlier distribution of schedules to advisors and students
• Increased initial advisor contact information to students including advisor name, phone number, office location, e-mail, and department phone number
• Creation of a more structured initial advising session to provide students with a tentative plan of study to follow on the path to their specific goals
• Encouragement of discourse between advisors and students relating to educational concerns to gain a greater understanding of our students needs in order to serve them better.

5. **Improve Advisor Access:** The creation of a walk-in advising center with specialists in each division would greatly alleviate this concern. The center must be operational at BOTH the Middletown and Newburgh locations and staffed properly and fully. Additionally/alternatively:

• Provide improved advisor contact information (as shown above)
• Properly pair student and advisor
  ○ Time (evening/evening)
6. **Improve Technology**: The College must address the need for implementation of a computerized degree audit/pre-requisite system. Every advisor must have access to a computer, the Internet, and the Student Information System. Technology may be used to improve the Advising system in the following ways:

- Online advisement and registration for students who request this service
- Advising via e-mail or Instant Messenger
- Frequently asked questions web site
- Advising chat room
- In-depth Program information available to students via web site or CD-ROM

**In Summary**

The academic advising system at SUNY Orange is currently not working because there has not been a significant movement to make the necessary changes. Any system without a well defined purpose and person with absolute accountability will fail. This committee strongly believes that the only way the academic advising system at Orange County Community College can improve is through a strong commitment to change from the entire college community and leadership.

The committee strongly recommends immediate implementation of whichever improvements that can be made prior to the assignment/hiring of a supervisor (e.g., improved communication and training).

This initiative should be considered a college-wide priority that must be supported by senior administration.

Without this commitment, we fear that the next Middle States Report will continue to echo the same criticisms we have been hearing since 1993.
Before conducting interviews and reviewing the identified materials, certain issues made themselves evident. The sub-committee categorized them as follows:

1. **Defining Enrollment Management:** Evidence collected from the interviews reaffirms the need for a clear and concise Enrollment Management model that includes all areas of the college and that can be understood by all areas within the college. The responses to the enrollment management interview question, which asked for a definition thereof, showed that there needs to be a clearer definition and understanding of enrollment management throughout Student Development and the campus community as a whole. There were common threads and components to the offered definitions and understandings of enrollment management, but no real consistency. And without a consistent definition/understanding of enrollment management, it is difficult for each staff member to identify his or her role and responsibilities in the process.

2. **Divisional Leadership:** The divisional leadership was also a consistent theme among the interviews and written responses received. One of the most evident issues that could be categorized under the heading of leadership is the low morale throughout the Student Development Division. This low morale is the result of a demonstrated need for more effective advocacy, more open communication and a better working knowledge of the reporting areas. Repeatedly identified needs for stronger advocacy from the leadership include staffing (especially the vacant Coordinator of Counseling and Advising position), space, equipment and other resources. The elimination of the mandatory division-wide
meeting results in missed opportunities for an open exchange of information and ideas. Many feel that the current round table format is not a sufficient replacement for this division meeting. Also, some respondents indicated that they feel that the leadership is not approachable. All of the above, along with an unclear understanding of department and divisional missions, indicate a clear deficiency in divisional leadership.

3. **Structure & Functions:** A number of issues were identified. In both Middletown and Newburgh the physical layout of some offices, the hours of operation for the offices, and the understaffed and/or unfilled positions in many departments of Student Development impede the quality and amount of services each area can provide. Additionally, there are two counselors handling many student development services (ie. admissions, financial aid, health services, academic advising, personal counseling, disability services, etc.) for the Newburgh Extension Center, the high demand for academic advising is preventing the counselors in the Middletown Counseling Center from providing personal counseling, and there is confusion/lack of direction in regard to the retention piece of the Student Success Center.

4. **Processes & Procedures:** There were 3 main findings. First, we are technologically behind in terms of providing enrollment management services. Secondly, there is a frequent lack of consistency in services provided by different offices and people in both Middletown and Newburgh. And thirdly, current college-wide policies and procedures are cumbersome, complicated, unevenly adhered to and possibly outdated.

5. **Communication:** Communication issues exist among colleagues, between staff and students, and between Student Development and Academic Affairs. Through the interview process, it became apparent that there are particular areas that do not relate in a collegial manner. The students surveyed also indicated that there is not a consistent customer service approach and no clear identification of the individual they are dealing with. And lastly, consistent with the Middle States report, the interview comments support the need for improved communication between Student Development and Academic Affairs.

6. **Outcomes Assessment:** With respect to outcomes assessment our findings were consistent with those of the Middle States Evaluation Team. There are some areas within Student Development that are collecting student feedback periodically and/or regularly, but there is a real need for the development of appropriate assessment methods and training on how to practice them.

**Recommendations**
For a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan to be successfully developed and implemented the issues identified by the sub-committee need to be addressed by the institution. We are recommending the following:

1. **Define Enrollment Management:** The college should consider adopting the following definition of Strategic Enrollment Management according to Michael Dolence, a consultant for educational institutions, who specializes in community colleges, focusing on strategic enrollment management (SEM):

   SEM is a comprehensive process* designed to help an institution achieve and maintain optimum enrollment, where optimum is defined within the academic context of the institution.
2. **Strengthen Divisional Leadership:** Administration should take steps to increase and strengthen the effectiveness and advocacy skills of the Student Development Leadership.

3. **Re-institute the Mandatory Student Development Division Meeting:** These meetings should be forums where information and ideas can be openly and freely exchanged among all those in attendance, and the current roundtable discussions can be used as a supplement to the division meetings. In addition, the leadership should set a block of time aside on a regular basis for meeting with any student development member on an individual basis to discuss anything.

4. **Develop and Gain Support for the Mission, Goals and Objectives for Areas within Student Development:** This is the responsibility of the divisional leadership. Therefore, a complete review of divisional, as well as department specific missions, goals, and objectives should be done. This review should include all members of the student development division, as well as students and key personnel outside of the division as deemed appropriate.

5. **Develop & Implement a Plan for Student Development:** This plan should be a three-fold process:

   A) **Evaluate the Functions and Structure of Student Development** and develop a plan that will lead to 1) the most effective way in which to provide services utilizing both conventional and alternative delivery systems and 2) the most efficient reporting structure that will optimize decision-making and communication. A review of services was recently completed for the Newburgh Extension Center which should be referenced when developing this plan.

   B) **Evaluate the Staffing Needs Required of the Structure Developed Above.** After the function/structure part of the plan is completed, a review of the staffing needs should take place to ensure that services are effectively delivered and a plan developed to obtain the needed staffing.

   C) **Evaluate the Physical Layout and Space Utilization Required of the Structure Developed Above.** After the staffing part of the overall plan is completed, a review of the physical layout and space utilization should be done to ensure positive public image, address privacy concerns, maximize workflow and significantly reduce student runaround. A plan should then be developed to achieve better space utilization for the immediate future and, for the long-range, to redesign the Commons Building.

6. **Perform a Complete Review and Update All Current Policies, Procedures and Processes:** This should be done for all policies, procedures and processes being used on campus and at extension sites in the enrollment management process. The current policies, procedures and processes were designed for the main campus only and have been patched as we have expanded to off-campus extension sites and the virtual campus. One of the most
important pieces that needs to be addressed while this review is taking place is the need for enhanced, state of the art technology and to keep in mind these enhanced technologies when revamping policies, procedures and processes. Specific examples of these technologies include, but are not limited to, computerization of the writing part of the assessment (complete the transition to Accu-Writer), Automated Phone Systems, Degree Audit, Web Registration, Scheduling Software, Tracking Software, Automated Financial Aid Packaging, Document Imaging, a Comprehensive Student Information System, and a divisional color printer and folding machine. Once the final review is completed, provide adequate training to ensure consistent application and enforcement of agreed upon college policies, procedures and processes.

7. **Require Mandatory Participation in Relevant Workshops:** In order to rectify the colleague communication issue, we feel that all enrollment management areas should participate in mandatory conflict resolution, civility in the workplace and team building workshops.

8. **Improve the Consistency of Customer Service:** We recommend mandatory customer service workshops, consistent approaches to answering phones and greeting students, wearing of identification tags, and a review of all written information sent to students (use more student friendly language). One specific means of addressing this communication issue would be to make our current student e-mail system more user friendly.

9. **Reconnect Student Development and Academic Affairs:** A means of doing this may be for the two divisions to embark on a joint effort to work on enrollment planning, enhance the collaboration between faculty and Counseling and Advising, put a mandatory 1st Year Student Experience Program in place, and improve New Student Orientation.

10. **Improve Assessment:** Begin by filling the Coordinator of Assessment position. In concert with the Middle States Evaluation Team’s recommendation, this individual should lead the Student Development Division, along with the entire college community, in developing appropriate and effective assessment methods and training on how to implement them.

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**Student Success and Retention Sub-committee Report**

**Statement of Charge to this Sub-committee**
The sub-committee’s charge was to review the processes, methods and structure used by the Student Development Division to deliver key services to students in the area of student success and retention and to make recommendations to address Middle States findings related to this area as well as to identify issues discovered during this review.

**Steps taken to Conduct the Review and Meet the Charge**
Reviewed Middle States Evaluation Team’s Report to SUNY Orange dated April 2004 Reviewed SUNY Orange’s Institutional Self-study Report dated February 2004
Interviewed 47 out of a possible 51 Student Development Division administrators and staff Interviewed 25 current students (Fall 2004) Viewed 21 additional responses within the Division as a result of e-mails sent out by the chair of the full committee
Compared above responses to questionnaire responses of the SUNY Orange Institutional Self-study Report

**Observations and Committee Findings**
There was not a clear or consistent definition among personnel of what constitutes Student Success and Retention.

After an in depth interview process of the entire Student Development Division it appears that eleven key issues affect Student Success and Retention:

Leadership
Communication
Staffing
Student Perceptions
New Student Orientation
Structure/function
Technology
Space
Assessment of Services
Newburgh Extension Center
Morale

1. **Advocacy and leadership from top levels in the Division are at a serious deficit.** There is not a clear sense of structure of the Division. During the interview process, thirty-one division members expressed serious concern over the lack of cooperation, understanding and competence above the director level.

   The perceptions of those who were interviewed felt that sharing knowledge was extremely limited due to strong personalities and ongoing “turf wars”. This leads to obstacles in servicing students. It was noted that the Division, as a whole, is not working as a team.

   Departments expressed a feeling of being left “floundering” on their own with no focal point or direction.

   When Division meetings were held, they served as a tool for open discussion and awareness without fear of repercussion for all members of the division. This provided a means for sharing information from other areas, as well, since at times guests from outside the Division were invited. The perception is that the current monthly Roundtables fall far short of serving this purpose.

   Several division members felt that management level staff wearing many “hats” creates a dysfunctional environment. This has a negative impact on efficiency, morale, student success and retention.

   Departments expressed concerns regarding the lack of communication and cross training that would allow departments to operate more effectively. The lack of respect shown the staff from the administration was strongly noted.

2. **Effective communication is lacking throughout the division.** The perception from the interviews is that information is not being disseminated properly from the top down. At peak times staff do not have the necessary tools and/or information to service students so they can be successful and continue pursuing their career goals. Flow of communication between and within levels and departments is lacking. The loss of the regular division meetings (including everyone at all levels and locations) has hindered open communication and the sharing of important information. This has been reported as interference with assisting students in achieving success and has impacted student retention.
For example, the department of Student Life is responsible for the College Information Desk. They receive a high volume of telephone calls for information, as well as, direct contact with students, staff and general public on a daily basis. Due in part to the changes in the software used by the central scheduling office, the Information Desk no longer receives information on events, programs, etc. being held at the college (Formerly, the Central Scheduling office was able to supply the Information Desk with a list of “happenings” on a monthly basis). Some departments share this information; however, others have not. Also, the only notification the Information Desk gets regarding snow closings is sent via e-mail; however, the Information Desk personnel do not have access to e-mail. In summary, there is a lack of information being provided by the Division and the campus overall.

3. **Staffing in most departments is at a severe shortage level.** This is especially true during peak times when the work load becomes unmanageable. This has produced tremendous stress for department personnel and results in students being misinformed and/or neglected. Many times students are “barked at” which causes them to “bark back” or to get disgusted and leave. This has a negative impact on student success and retention.

It was strongly felt that the Counseling Center needs its leadership position to be filled immediately and the position should be a Director not a Coordinator. It was also felt that the Director should be a licensed psychologist, as has been the case in the past. It is felt by many that a licensed psychologist would enhance the quality of services and programs offered by the department. In addition, a licensed psychologist would be helpful in addressing potential judicial situations involving students with mental health issues.

Primarily support staff members reported Civil Service titles not matching actual duties. This causes escalating animosity among staff (especially when short staffed). Also, the unequal proportioning of staffing levels and higher grades when compared to other divisions also affects morale.

It was reported that although the overall atmosphere has improved in the Financial Aid area, staffing shortage is a major problem especially during their mandatory 12 hour days during peak times (Mid-July through August and again in January). This creates stress and adds to the lack of office morale and cohesiveness when dealing with students. Staffing shortages were also reported in the Counseling & Guidance Center and Student Life.

While there has been an increase in evening hour coverage for Disabilities services, the review indicated a need for even more coverage. Also, both the Disabilities Advocate and the Coordinator of Student Support Services reported a high need for increased services at the Newburgh Extension Center.

4. **Student Perceptions**

Students were asked what their definition of Student Success and Retention is. Twenty-one out of twenty-five students responded the following general ideas:

a. Being involved with school and community 

b. Self-discipline and structure to complete their education at a level higher than their own expectations
c. Getting to know faculty and staff on other levels other than the classroom through committees, activities, and sporting events

d. To become well rounded individuals through positive experiences at SUNY Orange

Twelve out of twenty-five students felt counselors were very helpful and gave a clear explanation of what was expected of them while attending college. Fifteen out of twenty-five students expressed dissatisfaction waiting on line for more than 5 hours for the registration process (start to finish encompassing advising, financial aid, registration, bursar, I.D. cards and parking). Five out of twenty-five students noted that the Counseling Center lacks enough advisors during peak times. Twenty-one out of twenty-five students responded that the entire process of becoming a student is not laid out in a manner that is clear. Their perceptions included:

- Staff has little or no compassion for the new students who may not know the process.
- Financial Aid does not voluntarily inform students about alternative resources.
- The offices of Counseling/Advising, Financial Aid, and Registration do not have enough staffing available, at peak times, to assist students properly.

5. New Student Orientation

New student orientation, the key first step in student success after the registration process, is viewed by most of campus as a student life event rather than the college wide event that it should be.

Faculty, with a few exceptions, are reluctant to be involved with the program even though many voice support for it. Without the involvement of our faculty, the quality of the program suffers.

6. Structure and Function

The current structure of the Student Development Division does not appear to be the result of a careful analysis of the mission of the Division, needs of the student population or services provided.

The structure and function of Student Success Center is unclear. At present, it’s a one-person department under the leadership of the AVP of Student Development. It consists of a Coordinator of Student Success and Retention and student aides. The Success Center shares space with the new (F ‘04) Grant Funded Vocational Retention Specialist. This person reports to the Coordinator of Student Support Services but the rationale behind this reporting structure is unclear. Several reported this area could be better utilized if it had a clear mission and direction from the AVP.

There are software programs available from Career Services, Health Services and other areas of the College for their use. The Center also serves as an advising area for students during peak registration times.

The Student Success Center has no clear role in the institution. The Center is overseen by the Coordinator of Student Success and Retention but this individual does not have the authority to pursue many campus-wide initiatives he develops for a variety of reasons. The recent strategic plan proposal said the college “needs an individual in charge of Student Success and Retention.” The coordinator believed that was his job. Recently a Vocational Retention Specialist was hired through a grant without the knowledge of the coordinator or his input. This has all led to a great deal of frustration for the coordinator.
The Student Support Services (a grant funded department) is limited by the grant to serving 232 eligible students. The Coordinator of Student Support Services must document to the federal government that they are indeed serving the needs of these 232 students and has submitted a copy of the most recent report to document this. However there exists a perception by some of those interviewed, not within the department, that the actual number being served is unclear. Not all of the needs of these students are being met solely by Student Support Services. This population is also serviced by the Counseling Center, for instance, particularly in the area of academic advising. Currently, Student Support Services (Middletown and Newburgh) have a total of 70 official advisees listed in the computer and while their students are encouraged to come to them for academic advising, some simply may prefer to go the Counseling Center or have Counselors as assigned advisees for other reasons. As many of these 232 students as possible should have Student Support Services personnel as their assigned advisors.

In addition, The Coordinator of Student Support Services resides in the Counseling Center while the Advocate for Disabilities resides in the Student Support Services area adjacent to the Counseling Center. The Coordinator supervises the Disabilities Advocate (not grant funded); however, some of those interviewed questioned if it would be more appropriate for the Disabilities Advocate to report to and reside in the Counseling Center as it formerly did. Both the Associate Vice President of Student Development and the Coordinator of Student Support Services have explained the history as to why the change in both reporting structure and physical placement have occurred but based in part on comments made by interviewees, these decisions should be revisited.

The Counseling Center is not clear on what it is called: Counseling and Guidance Center or the Counseling and Advising Center. There is the title of Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs (this was changed at the Board of Trustee Meeting 2/14/05) and names an Office of Student Affairs, however, that person carries responsibility for Counseling and Guidance or (Counseling and Advising), and that same person carries the title of the Director of Financial Aid. (The AVP for Student Affairs is housed in the Counseling Center in a one person office which we think is the “Student Affairs Office”. There is not a Vice President for Student Affairs but there is a Vice President of Student Development and an Office of Student Development.

Staff members have not received official notifications of structural changes in the division.

7. **Technology**

The quality of technology throughout the division is seriously lacking. Individuals in some departments are still working on terminals rather than PC’s. Of the staff who have PC’s, a number of the computers and their operating systems are outdated and unreliable. Staff stated they find it difficult to effectively perform their jobs and serve students with the current level of technology.

The Student Success Center computers are out of date although it is marketed as a state-of-the-art facility.

8. **Space**

There seems to be a poor allocation of space throughout the Division. Some departments need increased space to meet student needs while simultaneously keeping issues of privacy.

Examples: Financial Aid and Career Services has privacy issues due to inadequate space and Disabilities Services does not have adequate space dedicated to testing.
9. **Assessment of Services**

Concern was expressed regarding the lack of effective evaluation of services throughout the Division.

For example: It’s perceived that if there was a formal assessment of the services of the Counseling and Guidance Center it would better clarify their role in Student Success and Retention.

10. **Newburgh Extension Center**

Newburgh Extension Center Staff indicated that the center is open more than the Middletown Campus during certain periods and promote a message of “stop in anytime and you will be served.” The perception is that the Student Development staff at NEC do not have direct supervision from anyone at NEC (most supervisors are in Middletown). This hinders staff from getting a clear role of the needs at the Newburgh Center. There is a feeling that the leadership of the division does not provide direction or a clear sense of the needs of NEC.

11. **Morale**

All of the topics covered to this point have culminated in the morale of the staff reaching a critically low point. It was consistent among interviews that departments are not working together in sharing information so that students can be processed in a thoughtful, caring manner. The perception is that students are run through a gauntlet and back again. The staff is divided and many do not know who others are or where they work. Many do not even attempt to speak to one another in passing. This impacts personnel as well as student success and retention because if we cannot communicate with each other we cannot effectively communicate with and serve our students.

Some noted administrative staff not speaking to employees for periods of time. Also, some reported being spoken to in a condescending and/or a vulgar manner.

**Summary**

The failings of advocacy and leadership at the top levels of this division has negatively impacted the delivery of key services to students and thus has negatively impacted Student Success and Retention.

**Student Success and Retention**  
Sub-committee of the Student Development Review Committee

**Recommendations**

1. Administration should address the lack of effectiveness of the top two levels of management.

2. Devise a campus-wide process to better inform the College Information Desk of pertinent information such as: academic events, room/time changes for campus functions, snow closings and cancellations, events sponsored by off campus groups, etc.
3. Return to monthly Division meetings requiring full attendance by all staff allowing for open communication and debate without fear of repercussion.

4. Return to having a Director of Counseling, preferably a licensed psychologist.

5. Job descriptions need to be reviewed or created, if necessary, for all positions within the Division.

6. Current staff shortages need to be identified and remedied as soon as possible.

7. Improve collaboration between Student Development and Academic Affairs as it pertains to faculty participation in New Student Orientation.

8. The Student Success Center needs to have a clear mission and purpose and the Coordinator’s role in Student Retention needs to be clarified.

9. Develop and implement a Retention plan to include a definition of Student Success and define each departments role in implementing the plan. Develop a clear and consistent role of Student Development Personnel related to Student Success and Retention. Each department’s mission should be incorporated in this definition.

10. Current Coordinator positions should be reviewed to determine if they should be made Directors, giving them authority and accountability to run their departments.

11. Address problems with the registration process (from start to finish encompassing advising, financial aid, registration, bursar, and I.D. cards/parking). Assign someone the responsibility of being accountable for processing the suggestions coming out of many meetings.

12. Clarify the role of the Student Support Services program within Student Development. Better integrate the services and cohesiveness with the Counseling Center.

13. Administration needs to address technology deficits throughout the Division by utilizing information that has already been collected by the Technology Advisory Group for Student Development.