

Student Success and Experience Working Group Summary Report through November 9, 2017

The Student Success and Experience Working Group met a total of four times over a period of 10 hours since the Strategic Planning Kick-off meeting on Monday, October 9.

For the first two meetings, the 13 members of our working group were divided into two smaller focus groups in an attempt to maximize discussion, inclusiveness, and the sharing of ideas. These two focus groups were held on Wednesday, October 11 from 8:00-10:00am and on Tuesday, October 17 from 2:30-4:30pm. Our initial discussions focused on (1) definitions of student success, (2) the current student experience at WKU, (3) some of current issues/problems hindering student success at WKU, (4) specific efforts and programs that are working to promote student success, and (5) what it means to be a student centered university.

Several overarching themes emerged from these discussion, and interesting, the overarching themes differed for each of the focus groups.

Overarching themes from Focus Group # 1 (October 11)

- We should consider rewarding and incentivizing innovative pedagogical approaches dealing with applied learning (faculty/staff partnership)
- It is essential for our students to have transferable / employable skills. These must be built into the curriculum and in co-curricular activities
- We have to do a better job with work study / student employment – especially for first year students
- We must recognize and promote student success for ALL students (cannot forget distance learning, adult learning, and graduate students)
- We should explore more opportunities for coaching/mentoring/advising
- We need to find a way of promoting greater parental involvement in the lives of students and our institution
- We have to do something to address silos through our strategic planning efforts
- We have to find a way of scaling up best practices that promote student success and retention
- Students need to have a meaningful first year experience
- The university must address the structural barriers hindering student success (e.g. students inability to build a schedule because classes are offered at the same times of the day; colonnade courses that are full before TOP sessions are complete)

Overarching themes from Focus Group # 2 (October 17)

- There is no coherent student identity at WKU (e.g. what does it mean to be a WKU student? A WKU graduate?). Nearly all of us on the working group cannot answer this question.
- We have to do a better job of creating a sense of belongingness and cohesiveness
- We need to ensure there is a continuity of experience for students. We must address the bureaucracy and built a holistic student experience.
- We need a selling point for our institution, something that people think of when they hear WKU. For example, a “student centered applied research university” is too broad. For example – what does applied research mean? This needs to be defined better. One area of strength at WKU is

students get to work closely with faculty and they have abundant applied learning opportunities. But, if we promote this, we have to deliver on this.

- We need quality classroom/course instruction
- We must be inclusive; we must value students; we must recognize that each student is unique
- We need to make the university easy for students to navigate and provide adequate student support services
- We should strive to ensure students have common intellectual experiences.

The working group met on Friday, October 20 from 12:30-4:00pm and on Friday, November 3 from 9:00am-Noon to discuss these themes and to begin thinking of a bold vision for student success and the student experience at WKU. Through conversation and debate, the workgroup coalesced around some central themes in preparation for the larger Strategic Planning Meeting on Thursday, November 9 from 6:00-8:00pm on the third floor of DSU.

Working group members believe that a student-centered university is one in which **WKU students are the center of an inclusive, supportive, and personalized learning environment that prepares them to lead successful, productive, and fulfilling lives.** To achieve this vision, we must:

- build a sense of belonging among students, faculty and staff;
- embed applied learning experiences into the curriculum, co-curricular activities, student activities, and into student employment;
- help students develop personalized action plans by the end of their first year (a financial plan, an academic plan, and a career plan);
- engage parents/love-ones of our students – and make them our partners in student success
- use analytics to model and determine tuition discount rates

As we move toward a bold vision for student success and the student experience at WKU, we must be mindful of the following:

- We need to be honest with ourselves and we cannot promise students something we cannot deliver. For example, if we say that WKU is a university where students work with faculty on applied research and other applied forms of learning, then we **MUST** deliver on this. Every student must have access to these opportunities.
- We need to do a better job of giving students a sense of belonging, applied learning experiences (in the classroom and outside of the classroom), family engagement, a more personalized learning experience, and to ensure that students are career ready
- **Most importantly, student success should not be what we do; it should be who we are**

Submitted respectfully by Jerry Daday and Martha Sales on behalf of the Student Success and Experience Working Group.