

Executive Summary

The Student Life Task Force was charged by the Provost to define the desirable elements for the co-curricular experience at an honors university and recommend strategies to involve the total University community in enhancing undergraduate and graduate life at UMBC. With this charge as a guide the Task Force held meetings during the 1999-2000 academic year. In its early discussions the Task Force produced a broad and comprehensive definition of student life. The following categories of student organizations, activities and services were identified as comprising student life at UMBC:

1. Student Organizations - sports and recreation; student governance; social/service/religious; and academic organizations
2. Student Services – the department sand offices that provide direct student services; student organizations that provide services to students
3. Civic Engagement – opportunities for student engagement and service to UMBC and the wider community
4. Academic Life – organizations and programs that support academic success
5. Social Life – opportunities for community building and entertainment
6. Diversity – opportunities for fostering diversity and interaction among different student groups

The above served as a framework for the Task Force’s data gathering and evaluation of current student life and recommendations for changes in the future. The Task Force collected data by conducting focus groups with undergraduate students, and e-mail surveys of graduate students and department Directors and Assistant Directors.

Through its meetings and data collection the Task Force has come to the general conclusion that student, faculty, and staff concerns about student life at UMBC are relatively basic and uncomplicated. The Task Force also concluded that once these basic needs are met, the nature of UMBC student life and the needs will change. Therefore, student life issues are viewed as a multi-stage, continuing process.

The Task Force recommendations fall into three basic categories: services that meet student’s essential needs; services that directly support academic life; programs that enhance community building and campus “spirit.”

- I. Services that Meet Students’ Essential Needs – Seven areas were identified under this category:
 1. Food Services – Students wanted more flexibility in the food services program; and an improvement in food options, variety, and quality. It was also strongly and consistently noted that there is a need for expansion in the availability of food on campus. The Task Force recommends that a facility,

such as a coffee house, be established on campus which would be open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

2. Campus Shuttle Service – A more extensive and flexible shuttle service is a major need especially for the students who live off campus and do not have automobiles, i.e. international students.
3. Parking – The Task Force recommends that continued be paid to addressing the expansion of parking facilities.
4. Postal Service – The Task Force recommends the establishment of a campus post office. The inability to purchase stamps, weigh packages, and mail letters and packages pose significant problems for residential and commuter students.
5. Commuter Student Services – The Task Force recommends that the Office of Commuter Affairs be reestablished on campus to address the unique needs of this segment of the student population.
6. Evening Student Services – The hours when key services and facilities are opened needs to be expanded to serve these students.
7. Student-Oriented Customer Service – Attention should be focused on improving the quality of customer service to students. Every unit on campus that provides direct service to students should be evaluated on a regular basis as to quality of their services. Further, mechanisms should be put into place which provides training, support, and rewards staff that excel in delivering services to students.

II. Services that Directly Support Academic Life – Three areas were identified under this category:

1. Library Services – The hours of the library should be greatly expanded to meet the needs of a growing undergraduate and graduate student population. The library should expand the study space available for graduate students. The library holdings should be increased to support graduate level study and research.
2. Financial Support for Graduate Students - There should be an increase in assistantships, fellowships, and other support. Additional funds should be provided for graduate travel and research grants.
3. Faculty Student Interaction – There needs to be an examination and implementation of ways to increase campus-wide faculty/student interaction. Several ideas are suggested in the full support. One suggestion is that the Provost support one event per year for each department to host an informal faculty/student social event.

III. Programs that Enhance Community-Building and Campus “Spirit” – Seven areas were identified under this category:

1. Comprehensive Marketing Plan – The number and variety of activities, organizations, services, and programs that currently exist are extensive. However, these opportunities are often not know to students. The Task Force

recommends that funds be provided to develop a comprehensive marketing plan for all aspects of student life. Suggested elements are computer kiosks, digital message boards, and better use of the website home page for advertising.

2. Weekend Programs and Services – The most recurring need expressed by students was the need for more events and services on weekends. The Task Force recommends that a Weekend Planning Committee be established with the task of developing a report on appropriate programs and services that would meet the needs of both residential and commuter students.
3. All-Campus Programming – The University should support one event a month during the academic year that brings the entire school community together. The Task Force recommends that a Major Events Fund be established to support these events.
4. Additional Space for Events and Improvements in Space Scheduling -- With the addition of large-scale events, additional campus venues need to be provided and the system for scheduling campus space needs to be modified.
5. Focal Point for Socializing and Entertainment on Campus -- The University should create an avant-garde campus coffeehouse to be the focus of evening and weekend informal entertainment and socializing.
6. Enhanced Undergraduate Orientation -- Efforts are already underway to change the orientation program so that new students are better integrated into campus life, and the Task Force supports these efforts.
7. Opportunities for Community Building for Graduate Students – To provide a mechanism for the growing graduate student population the Task Force recommends the establishment of a “pub” for graduate students in the new University Commons. This facility would be open during the evenings and weekends hours when graduate students are most likely to be on campus.

UMBC is doing a lot of things right when it comes to student life. For instance, student consistently stated that there were enough diverse groups and organizations on campus to match just about everyone’s needs. However, many of the concerns outlined in this report have been consistently noted in the Middle States Accreditation Reports since 1976. Improving student life at UMBC should be an ongoing process. Actions taken related to this report should only be viewed as a preliminary step in this process.