## **Project Details**

| Title                 | Examining Student Life's Residence Hall Program as it Relates to Retention | Status           | ACTIVE         |
|-----------------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| Category              | 3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs                    | Updated          | 09-26-<br>2011 |
| Timeline              |  | Reviewed         | 09-28-<br>2011 |
| Planned I<br>09-01-20 | Project Kickoff<br>010   | Created          | 09-03-<br>2010 |
| Target Co<br>09-01-20 | ompletion<br>011   | Last<br>Modified | 10-04-<br>2011 |

## . 1:

### **Project Accomplishments and Status**

## • A:

An initial review of retention data indicated that the retention rate among residential students had fallen below that of commuters. After a further review, it was determined that actually there was not a statistical difference in the retention rate of commuters versus residential students. However, as the literature suggests that retention rates for residential students should exceed that of commuters, the committee determined that it would research ways to increase residential retention.

We completed our study of Student/Residential Life and came up with several recommendations in one academic year. Implementation of the recommendations will take more than one year, but we have started making some suggested changes. For example, we have re-worked our orientation programs and begun a Student Leadership Program to encourage our students to higher levels of performance as well as to assist Student Life, Admissions, and other offices in their work with other students, especially freshmen. We have taken steps to work more closely with the (academic) First Year Experience program. We moved the Student Life Offices to be better situated for student access and to interact with other offices providing complementary services. We have prepared a plan for a facelift of our older residence hall. And we have proposed to administration funding an Association of College and University Housing Officers – International and Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (ACUHO-I/EBI) student assessment survey for next year. The University has already begun to implement the National Student Survey of Engagement (NSSE), which should be helpful as well. Given the importance and size of the athletic challenge, that was assigned to a separate committee. Where appropriate that committee's

recommendations will be joined with those of Student Life. (A detailed report of the Student/Residential Life Committee recommendations is available upon request.)

## • R:

During the previous year, the University of Saint Mary has made "reasonable progress' toward some of the goals set forth in the original action project outline. Specifically, the institution originally stated that the goal of the project was to study the low retention rate among residential students "to determine its cause or causes and to take remedial action." There was also agreement that if other factors (beyond Student Life) were involved, the committee would investigate ways that those factors could be mitigated. Upon additional investigation, it was discovered that the original data-set upon which the project was based was inaccurate. The retention rate among residential students was actually statistically similar to that of commuters still a legitimate cause for concern as it should be higher according to literature in the field of retention. The committee wisely determined that they would continue to research ways in which retention rates among residential students could be improved. Several recommendations were developed and implementation has begun with many of them. It does not appear, however, that the recommended changes have been fully implemented and/or evaluated for efficacy.

# · 2:

#### Institution Involvement

# • A:

This project is aimed at Student Life, and especially our residential program. But since we found that the majority of our residential students were athletes and almost 80% of leaving residential students were athletes, the project will significantly impact athletics, as well as the general student population. Admissions and Student Success offices were involved, as were Athletics and student leaders.

# • R:

The University of Saint Mary involved people in many aspects of this project. Initially, a committee was convened to examine the causes of retention issues among residential students. Later a separate committee was created and convened to examine retention issues that are specific to residential athletes. One suggestion would be to combine these committees in order to utilize the expertise of all members. Very often, Student Life and other

enrollment professionals focus on retention and residential life in general with little understanding of the unique challenges that athletes face. Likewise, many professionals in the field of athletics focus almost exclusively on building competitive teams with little regard to the overall retention statistics at the institution. A combined committee would reduce the chance of a singular focus and would provide an opportunity for education and understanding among colleagues.

# · 3:

#### **Next Steps**

### • A:

As previously noted, having completed our study of Student/Residential Life and come up with several recommendations, we have started making some suggested changes. For example, we have re-worked our orientation programs and begun a Student Leadership Program to encourage our students to higher levels of performance as well as to assist Student Life, Admissions, and other offices in their work with other students, especially freshmen. We have taken steps to work more closely with the (academic) First Year Experience program. We moved the Student Life Offices to be better situated for student access and to interact with other offices providing complementary services. We have prepared a plan for a facelift of our older residence hall. And we have proposed to administration funding an Association of College and University Housing Officers – International and Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (ACUHO-I/EBI) student assessment survey for next year. The University has already begun to implement the National Student Survey of Engagement (NSSE), which should be helpful as well. Given the importance and size of the athletic challenge, that was assigned to a separate committee. Where appropriate that committee's recommendations will be joined with those of Student Life. (A detailed report of the Student/Residential Life Committee recommendations is available upon request.)

# • R:

The University of Saint Mary appears to have reasonable next steps planned for implementation of this action project. Planned changes (based on the committee's study) include a revamped orientation program, implementation of a new student leadership program, increased collaboration with the FYE program, increased accessibility to Student Life Offices, and residence hall renovations. Additionally, a proposal has been made for the funding of the ACUHO-I/EBI survey and implementation of the NSSE survey has begun. The NSSE survey, in particular, will likely generate a very sizeable amount of usable data over the next few years that can be used to inform decisions

regarding retention initiatives. No indication is given regarding the methods that the committee utilized to develop its recommendations. If the recommendations were not data-based, USM may find that NSSE data does not support the committee's recommendations and, in that case, the recommendations should be revalidated.

### • 4:

### **Resulting Effective Practices**

# • A:

We reviewed all aspects of residential life, including but not limited to the demographics of our student residents, cost, campus programs, Student Life staff duties, etc. in our attempt to improve retention. We have re-worked our orientation programs and begun a Student Leadership Program to encourage our students to higher levels of performance as well as to assist Student Life, Admissions, and other offices in their work with other students, especially freshmen. We have taken steps to work more closely with the (academic) First Year Experience program. We moved the Student Life Offices to be better situated for student access and to interact with other offices providing complementary services. We have prepared a plan for a facelift of our older residence hall. And we have proposed to administration funding an Association of College and University Housing Officers -International and Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (ACUHO-I/EBI) student assessment survey for next year. The University has already begun to implement the National Student Survey of Engagement (NSSE), which should be helpful as well. Given the importance and size of the athletic challenge, that was assigned to a separate committee. Where appropriate that committee's recommendations will be joined with those of Student Life. (A detailed report of the Student/Residential Life Committee recommendations is available upon request.)

# • R:

It is too soon to say if any effective practices were developed as a result of this action project. Committee recommendations were only recently implemented and no evaluation of the efficacy of the recommended changes was presented. In order to consider a practice effective, proof of its effectiveness must exist.

# 5:

### **Project Challenges**

## • A:

A committee consisting of members of Student Life, students, faculty, and the Student Success Office is meeting regularly to make recommendations to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Those committee's recommendations are then forwarded to the Faculty Senate and the President of the university for their review and approval. As previously noted, the committee is recommending the ACUHO-I/EBI assessment tool as the best option for a true picture of residential issues, but improvements should be reflected in NSSE and other data we collect on retention, which can be broken out for residential students and commuters. If successful, we should see an improvement in retention rates for our overall student population. Early indictors are positive. We are therefore prepared to retire this action project following AQIP review.

## • R:

Obstacles facing USM in relation to this action project appear to be the lack of data supporting the success of the recommended changes. USM states that "early indicators are positive," in regard to the changes, however, there is no further explanation of how that conclusion was reached. Similarly, additional data is needed to determine what factors are influencing athletes' decisions to leave, especially since they comprise such a large portion (80%) of the leaving residential population. Are these students leaving because of issues related to athletics (scholarship not being renewed, insufficient playing time, ineligibility, etc.), or are they leaving due to other concerns? Overall, some progress toward the stated goals of the action project has been made, but retirement of this project appears to be premature. There is no indication of the success (or lack thereof) of the project and no indication that the recommended changes have influenced the retention rate. Further, there is no information presented regarding the findings of the secondary, athletic committee and no indication that the athletic committee has completed the requested study.