

Improvement Dimension Feedback California State University-San Marcos

Dear Improvement Committee Members,

Your finished report caught me at an extremely busy travel time; hence, the delay in my response. You have done an outstanding job of responding to specific performance indicators and in outlining your responses so that they are easy to follow and understand. But what is even more significant is CSUSM's commitment to assessment as evidenced by the many examples you share.

The assessment you have conducted indicates a number of problems with the way you provide advising early in the term. You have developed potential strategies to respond to the advising needs students have at this point in time, and I hope state budgets make it possible for you to execute a viable plan for improvement. You are wise to consider the cost implications of your decisions, especially in regard to requiring GEL 101. Although such a requirement would have a number of advantages, you may find costs to be prohibitive. And of course, cost is not the only factor you'll need to consider before moving in this direction.

The lower division roadmaps seem to me an excellent aid that students can use both to develop and follow a systematic plan toward degree completion. But it's probably unrealistic to expect students to use these aids on their own with only one introduction at Orientation. It seems that advisors would find this a valuable tool and would "consistently use the LDRs" with students. Is the use of LDRs a part of GEL 101? I would assume so. I'm sure there is more work to be done on the LDRs so that they relate to all majors and so that students find the help they need when courses aren't available. I hope that you'll not only continue using this device, but that you'll also share this idea with others at regional and national conferences. I think it's a creative way to begin the process of empowering students to take more responsibility for their own academic progress.

It is obvious that you are making significant progress in assuring that students who need remediation are getting it and in eliminating unnecessary and confusing barriers. I will be really curious to learn if the addition of supplemental instruction helps reduce the failure and/or drop-out rate for students in math.

The picture you paint with regard to gathering and using information about students is mixed. I was especially intrigued by the differences in students' reports of faculty accessibility and interaction with faculty out of class. Of course the survey questions were different to some degree, but I am surprised that there is not more alignment of response patterns between the IPA and FoE surveys on questions related to interaction with faculty.

What do you know about the actual use of campus services by students? Do you track usage in any way? Especially troubling was your finding that 48% of spring GEL students “had yet to make an advising appointment.” Did any of those students begin in the fall, or are they new spring admits?

I would encourage you to be serious about class attendance, especially early in the first year. I don’t know whether you need a policy or just a good conversation among faculty about how to get students to class. This is SO basic to student academic performance, especially as students begin the first year.

It is obvious that you are learning from and sharing with others through invited guest speakers, conference attendance, etc. In the short run, the current financial tsunami will make it difficult to travel far from home base, but I hope you’ll find ways to convene regional groups or to interact with others through on-line formats. This financial mess won’t last forever!

I am not surprised that your committee conversations went beyond the strict confines of the PIs that were part of this Dimension. Obviously, almost every aspect of the first year relates to how you measure your effectiveness and use those results as you go forward.

Although I haven’t commented on every aspect of your excellent report, I commend you for your comprehensive analysis. I would be happy to respond to additional questions you might have or to clarify any of my above comments. It has been a sincere pleasure to work with you.

Best wishes!

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