Students First Report
June 2010

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Farmingdale State College
State University of New York
I. Introduction

The Students First (SF) initiative was announced by President W. Hubert Keen in May 2009 as a mechanism to examine the delivery of student services and improve these services, where warranted. As a result, SF is designed to be an organized, comprehensive effort to enhance the campus-wide student experience by ensuring that all students are properly and efficiently served in key areas such as admissions, financial aid, student accounts, registrar, health and wellness, individual academic departments (including out of classroom assistance such as advisement), and other critical and relevant functions of the College. SF also represents the College's intention to create and maintain a culture of courtesy, respect, responsiveness, and assistance in all interactions with students.

President Keen's rationale for commencing this effort is clear: the College is growing in almost every conceivable way — applications, enrollment, academic programs, faculty, research enterprise, and infrastructure, to name a few. This growth demands an obligation and a responsibility to ensure that the campus has adequate resources to deal with a variety of student issues. Once the College has recruited and enrolled students, it is necessary for its staff to make good on the excellent image that has evolved, and to have substance behind the promises the College makes and the way we keep them. This is essential to the goal of continuing to improve our stature with prospective students and parents, the business community, the media, and within SUNY, while having a positive impact on the College's retention rate.

The SF committee was composed of representatives from administration, faculty, professional staff, students, and alumni. It was charged with examining three important elements as they relate to the service being provided to students and prospective students:

1. Procedure, policies, and protocols (3 Ps)
2. Staffing
3. Attitude and culture

Furthermore, the SF committee was asked to take the following actions, where possible and applicable:

1. Identify critical areas of concern
2. Identify personnel issues
3. Review and recommend modification of the 3 Ps (where needed)
4. Review and recommend modification of the organizational structure
5. Evaluate resource allocation (staffing, budget)
6. Evaluate infrastructure needs
7. Identify successful practices as models
8. Identify areas for further exploration

The first meeting of the full committee was held on October 23, 2009.
II. Students First Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Calabria, Co-Chair</td>
<td>Vice President for Institutional Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Esnes-Johnson, Co-Chair</td>
<td>Dean of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanda Bordies-McCormick</td>
<td>Ornamental Horticulture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Bryer</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan Cooper</td>
<td>Sociology and Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanda Bordies-McCormick</td>
<td>Student Success Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Dunn</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Hayden-Miles</td>
<td>Dean, School of Health Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Leon*</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee Milevoj</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gene Peters</td>
<td>EOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Rampello</td>
<td>Alumnus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Rupp</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
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*resigned February 1, 2010
III. Executive Summary

Farmingdale State College is at an important stage of its development, growing in size and expanding academic offerings. With this growth and progress come expectations from — and obligations to — students. The College cannot truly advance if it does not also increase and improve its services to its most important constituency.

Clearly, the demand for these services will continue to grow along with enrollment. It is indisputable that Farmingdale should be adequately staffed and must ensure the resources and efficiencies to provide good service. Yet, the Students First committee recognizes that, as with all SUNY institutions, the College is constrained by declining state budget support. The 10 general findings and 20 specific recommendations contained in this report should be viewed in that context, and as aspirational. Senior administration will evaluate these recommendations for their value, priority, and feasibility.

It is clear that some steps are already necessary and feasible to make Farmingdale the kind of institution that will continue to offer high quality instruction in a student-focused environment. The College should take immediate actions where possible and where benefit to students is tangible and measurable. And it must seize this opportunity to re-assess the way in which students are treated, administered, and guided through their academic experiences.

General Recommendations

- Improve the culture
- Managers must lead the way
- Improve communications
- Address staffing issues
- Present a positive image of the campus
- Enhance the aesthetic environment
- Assess organizational relationships
- Invest in technology
- Make Student Government transparent
- Replicate good models

Specific Recommendations

- Conduct an annual review of policies
- Assess the quality of student service
- Provide performance counseling and training for staff
- Create accountability
- Establish a campus communications policy
- Develop long-term/short term staffing plans
- Institute integrated staffing
- Enhance academic advisement
- Engage Student Government
- Address lighting, signage and parking
- Mandate weather emergency procedures
- Expand online services
- Plan for growth in resident housing
- Focus on transfer students' needs
- Publish a student newspaper regularly
- Maintain a good campus appearance
- Create a scheduling and events manager position
- Improve the promotion of scholarships
- Re-evaluate space for student service areas
- Invite more input on food service
IV. Report Development

A. In order to be efficient and focused in its efforts, the SF committee divided itself into four sub-groups, listed below, and assigned 6-7 administrative and service areas to each sub-group. These sub-group topics were chosen on the basis of how critical they were to the College's objective of meeting the needs of its students, as well as how these particular student service areas might be related and how they might interact. Each sub-group contained 3-4 committee members and, where possible, a diverse representation — i.e. administration, faculty, and a student or member of the alumni. Sub-group members also were assigned based on areas of specific knowledge and interest. No committee members were assigned to sub-groups covering areas in which they acted in a supervisory capacity.

Students First Committee Sub-Groups

Group A
Members: Terry Esnes-Johnson, Robin Dunn, Gary Rupp
- Administration
- ASC
- Food Service
- Bookstore
- University Police
- Academic Computing Services/Help Desk Services
- Academic Departments

Group B
Members: Marie Hayden-Miles, Vanda McCormick, Gene Peters
- Registrar
- Admissions
- Auxiliary Admissions
- Transfer Services/Credit Evaluation
- Financial Aid
- Student Accounts

Group C
Members: Evan Cooper, Marguerite D'Aloisio, Juan Leon, Frank Rampello
- OSSSD (disability services)
- Career Development
- EOP
- Student Activities/FSG
- Personal Counseling Services
- Health and Wellness

Group D
Members: Jennifer Bryer, Patrick Calabria, Renee Milevoj
- Student Success Center
- Tutoring (including Math and Writing Centers)
- Dean of Students/Orientation
- Campus Housing
- Library
- Athletics/Recreation
- Open House/Commencement

B. The Students First committee held regular meetings throughout the 2009-10 academic year. Meeting dates were:

- October 23, 2009
- November 13, 2009
- December 15, 2009
- January 19, 2010
- February 2, 2010
- February 23, 2010
- March 18, 2010
- May 6, 2010

In addition, sub-groups met at their own discretion.
C. Preliminary reports were provided to update President Keen on the progress of the Students First initiative. The SF committee provided two such updates — the first in February, 2010 and the second in April, 2010.

D. Each sub-group conducted interviews covering the areas they were responsible for examining. The interviews were conducted, where possible, with both supervisory personnel and staff for the particular area. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to personnel. Each sub-group was responsible for developing its own questionnaire, although a template was provided to the committee members for their consideration. When appropriate and necessary, follow-up interviews, requests for information, and the like, were conducted both by sub-group members and committee members who may have been outside the sub-group. All interviews were held with the understanding that the conversations would be confidential where specific complaints were raised, in order to encourage a free and uninhibited discussion. Where it was appropriate to consider such complaints, they were included in this report anonymously. Broad issues, observations, and suggestions are contained in the general language of the report and are, likewise, unattributed.

The total number of people who were interviewed or who responded to questionnaires was 41. A total of 315 hours were spent in the research, coordination, and development of this report (good faith estimate) based on the number of hours dedicated by committee members, faculty, and staff. This figure includes SF committee meetings, Town Hall meetings, interviews, research, data mining, analysis, coordination, and report creation.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of Interviews Conducted with FSC Administrators, Faculty, Staff, and Students</th>
<th>Research, Analysis, Interviews, Data Mining, Coordination and Creation of Report</th>
<th>Meeting Time: Committee Sub-groups Town Halls</th>
<th>Total Hours Spent by Committee Members in the Development of the Students First Report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>126 hours</td>
<td>189 hours</td>
<td>315 hours</td>
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E. Data was collected and distributed to committee members in order to assist them in their examination of their assigned areas. Sources of data included survey information originally collected for Middle States Accreditation, the ACT Evaluation/Survey, Strategic Technology Plan, Student Affairs and Services Report, admissions surveys, and surveys of alumni and resident students. The committee had access to any data it required, through requests, the College web site, and the Banner system. Such data included enrollment, student retention, demographic information, financial information, staffing, strategic planning, and resource allocation.

F. Additional input from students was gathered through Town Hall meetings held on April 13 and April 15, 2010. These meetings included a cross-section of students — full-time, part-time, transfers, traditional and non-traditional, and residents. Many of the comments and observations made at these meetings are contained in this report. A Students First generic e-mail also was established to encourage input and was promoted on the home page of the College web site as well as in student e-news, campus e-news, and the Campus Times.
V. General Recommendations

Improve the Culture
Throughout its exploration of the campus, interviewing of staff, collection of observations and input, and an intuitive knowledge of the College, the SF committee identified an overarching theme to what must be done to improve service to students: transform the culture.

The environment simply does not yet exist where providing exceptional student service is uppermost in the minds of all faculty, supervisors, and staff. Some departments prioritize good service and are very good at delivering it, others complain that resources make it challenging for them to be responsive, and still others simply do not seem to think about it at all.

There are abundant anecdotal examples of unsatisfactory service — telephones unanswered, phone calls unreturned, and rude behavior, to name a few. In one instance relayed to the committee, a student traveling from New York City to campus was a few minutes late for an appointment, the last one scheduled for the day. Upon arrival, the student was informed that the office was closed and the appointment would not be re-scheduled until the next day — even though personnel were available to provide the service. This officious and inflexible attitude — “rules are rules” — caused the student to make a second, lengthy trip with no regard to the personal hardship endured.

Another student was required to appear at an office three times before a required document could be obtained due to the unavailability of staff, without even an apology offered. The current environment is one in which policies are cited at times when common sense should prevail.

The committee has been persuaded that no significant change can occur unless administrative personnel, faculty and staff have the willingness to accept that improvement is needed, make a commitment to do what they can to accelerate change, and recognize that they are the guardians of the College’s image and reputation. This change cannot be forced; it must come through full understanding and support of the objective the campus has established, with the complete cooperation of administrators, faculty and staff, and the acknowledgment that good student service is a primary obligation and responsibility of everyone.

It is the responsibility of senior and middle administration to take the necessary steps to begin this process.

The concept for Students First was created by the administration. Now the administration must underscore its commitment to SF, create an environment where respectful behavior toward students is not only encouraged, but expected, and build an atmosphere that establishes accountability.

Managers Must Lead the Way
We understand that senior and mid-level administrators are not chiefly the personnel who serve students on a daily basis. While direction and vision must come from administration, it is in large part the managers supervising staff in key areas that can make the greatest contribution in implementing Students First. For Students First to succeed, the managers must lead the way.

In fact, in many corners of the campus, this is already being done. There are departments that understand and embrace the SF concept — and, in fact, have been operating in such a fashion for many years. These departments do not allow themselves to be constrained by bureaucracy, or limited by resources, when it comes to providing good service.

The current environment is one in which policies are cited at times when common sense should prevail.
Yet, while “best practices” exist in many departments, improvements still need to be made.

Too often, other managers and staff do not use staff shortages or financial challenges as opportunities to advocate for change. The committee heard many complaints about issues — outdated computers, inadequate seating for students, and the like — complaints that can, and should, be resolved by managers at the departmental level. Long-standing policies, some outdated, are used as rationale for preserving the status quo. There is often a lack of effort and creativity in trying to bring about change that is overdue. This attitude has an impact on our students and the way they, and their parents, perceive the campus.

Comments provided to the SF committee indicate that some managers tolerate behavior by staff toward students that should not be acceptable, and must be addressed. The abrupt tone, patronizing approach, and lack of responsiveness demonstrated by some individuals demands correction, and that demands intervention by supervisors.

To this end, managers must formally instruct their staffs that courtesy, responsiveness, patience, understanding, and other characteristics of good service will be customary. Managers must intervene in difficult situations to support and lead staff by example. They must enforce the expectations with protocols, training, mentoring, guidance, and (if necessary) performance counseling to ensure that the objectives are met.

We appreciate that not all complaints are reasonable or even factual; yet, if SF is to be credible and successful, a procedure must be created by each manager that takes complaints or unacceptable behavior seriously, examines them promptly, and results in appropriate action so problem areas and personnel can be identified and remediated.

While a lack of initiative sometimes exists, administrative support of managers to resolve problems beyond available resources is also necessary for success.

**Improve Communications**

Communication is frequently a challenge in large, complex organizations, and especially in one that has 7,000 students and 1,000 employees — and which is composed of departments with functions as diverse as academics, physical plant, athletics, food service, admissions, research, and many others with distinct responsibilities. For this reason, it is essential that communications be inclusive, that students and other campus constituencies be fully informed, and that departments have effective and efficient channels of communication between them.

Of course, there is no single answer to good communication. It requires a variety of components, each with a different function. Together, this “quilt” of communication efforts can provide much — if not, all — of the information students (and the campus, and the public) generally need.

The College has made much progress in this area, and should strive to make more. An electronic newsletter is distributed to faculty and staff, although it contains so much detail it can be confusing and, therefore, is not always an effective communications tool. And while a similar weekly electronic newsletter is sent to students, its graphic appearance is dull and should be visually improved; it also requires a better organizational format to improve “readability.”

The monthly *Campus Times*, serving the entire campus community, is distributed in hard copy through buildings on campus and is posted online. The web site has been enhanced. New electronic signs at the two main entrances to campus also serve as venues to relay important information and present a welcoming feeling. President Keen writes a regular blog on the College web site, addressing key issues and inviting feedback, and the College is heavily invested in social media as an additional way to reach students and prospective students.
Yet, “lack of communication,” has been a consistent complaint among staff when the issue of service to students is raised. Individuals must take the initiative to ask, learn, or find out. Complaints that a department or person was not informed about a campus event, for example, strain credulity when the campus is publishing, publicizing, and distributing a great volume of information in a variety of ways.

Communication is not only “push” — delivering information to consumers; it is also “pull” — individuals taking a pro-active approach to making sure they are informed. There must be more effective communication between and among departments — both academic and student services — so that student issues are efficiently resolved. “Nobody told me,” ceases to be a valid explanation when there are many ways to get an answer that simply require some initiative.

For instance, the College has an Emergency Response Communication Plan (see page 12). The administrators involved in such a response are given the communications plan, and they are required to have this plan accessible to them at all times. Not only does this plan organize the emergency response, it serves as a communications protocol.

Having departments organize their own communications plans to effectively manage daily and unforeseen events is one potential way to address this challenge.

A critical flaw in communications with students is beyond the scope of administrative departments and individuals — the lack of a viable student newspaper. For the 2009-10 academic year, the student newspaper Rambler was published only once during the first semester, and it has appeared irregularly the last few years. The absence of a regularly-published student newspaper, engaging students in issues of importance to them and providing information about campus issues and campus activities is an obstacle to creating a dynamic student life experience.

The lack of such a publication on a thriving campus like Farmingdale’s is not only detrimental to the progressive and positive image the campus is cultivating, it is a disservice to students whose mandatory activity fees fund the Farmingdale Student Government Association (FSG) and student clubs such as the newspaper. In effect, the students are not getting what they are paying for. This issue must be chiefly addressed by FSG with appropriate support and counsel from the College.
Emergency Response Critical Path Communications

Tier I

University Police Duty Officer
- University Police Chief
- Director of Physical Plant

Respond
- Arrive, analyze & report
- Notify, advise & update

Activate Emergency Operations Group

Senior Vice President

President

Tier II

VP for Institutional Advancement

Director of Communications
- Media Notifications

VP Academic Affairs/Provost
- Vice President Student Affairs

Chief Development Officer

Tier III

Deans
- Director College Housing
- Director Health & Wellness
- Director Psych Services

AVP Administrative Service
- Controller
- Athletic Director
- Exec Director Bioscience Park

Activate Divisional or Departmental Emergency Plans.
Address Staffing Issues

In the Writing Center, lines of students spill out of the doors waiting to be helped. In the Math Center, there is no staff member available to answer phones or return e-mails; shortages in the Tutoring Center and many other key areas also exist. Clearly, staffing is one of the most challenging issues the College faces, and certainly one of the most critical. Obstacles to fully addressing staffing needs include an unpredictable state budget process that inhibits adequate long-term planning. Naturally, the College is reluctant to add personnel when financial considerations tied to a reduction in state support might require the termination of the same personnel after only a few months. This would be neither right for the campus, nor fair to the employees. We understand these financial realities.

It is apparent, however, that Farmingdale must review its strategy for filling positions in student service areas. Supervisory personnel should evaluate how personnel are being used in order to maximize the productivity and improve departmental efficiency. New methods of deploying personnel or technology may mitigate some of the problems these important departments struggle with; a solution as simple as an additional phone line would allow fax transmissions to be delivered directly to EOP instead of having them first needlessly routed to Admissions. Such strategies should at least be considered where not already being used.

Of course, we recognize that some staffs are overwhelmed, especially during peak periods, and the lack of appropriate staffing has an impact on their ability to provide excellent service, even if the desire is strong. These staffers often face the brunt of frustration, are subjected to verbal abuse and ridicule by students and parents, and are not equipped with the resources to diffuse the anger they face. They may even sympathize with the complaints being made, but that is of little consolation to the confused student or the angry parent trapped in bureaucracy.

Having staff with expertise in a variety of areas where they can be utilized in Counseling, EOP, Admissions, and other areas may be a realistic way to address staffing during these financially-challenged times. Similar models of integration may also be effective.

As with other issues, a lack of staffing cannot simply act as a rationale for poor performance. It is up to personnel — and especially supervisors — to advocate for additional staff in a thoughtful and persuasive way, or re-organize. It is also up to administration to address staffing priorities.

Present a Positive Image of the Campus

Few interactions shape the perception of students and the public more than how they are able to contact and converse with campus departments through the telephone. These interactions are a primary image-maker for the College. Yet, some departments and individuals appear to ignore the most fundamental practices when it comes to the telephone. At times, key departments are virtually inaccessible by phone and others are operating with obsolete equipment. Some key areas are not even equipped with voicemail, or individuals do not implement it.

Even when used, voicemail messages can be inadequate or obsolete — one message still refers to documents needed for “Fall 2003.”

During the February 2010 blizzard, one academic department’s phone voicemail relayed the message that the secretary would not be reporting to work — no alternative way to reach anyone in the department was offered, nor was the phone forwarded to anyone else to accept messages. Several other academic departments, and at least one administrative department, failed to adjust their office voicemails — as directed by the President — to advise callers that classes were cancelled in accordance with the College’s announcement. No direction was offered to students who might have wanted to inquire about re-scheduling of exams or other pertinent information. Another department directed student callers who needed assistance with a particular issue to another phone extension; yet, the extension was not manned to handle the calls.
When classes resumed, some students traveled to campus in less than desirable weather conditions only to find that their instructor failed to appear — without notification to the affected students and in apparent violation of campus policy.

And in what must be an especially frustrating experience for students, some department phones ring *ad infinitum* without (1) being answered or (2) voicemail being activated. Despite assurances from some departments that telephones are answered promptly, both personal experience and anecdotal evidence suggest this is not always the case. The committee finds it unacceptable — there is no other word — that, at the very least, departments and staff do not use voicemail when they are unable to answer the phones themselves.

This is particularly a problem on holidays and vacations, when a voicemail tape should explain the office is closed or the individual is away. It is also an issue in the summer, when many academic departments are not functioning with full staffs, but nevertheless are obliged to have someone available to answer phones. A student who has a question related to the curriculum, or needs other academic guidance, should be able to reach someone on the phone who can help him, or who can direct him how to get help during normal business hours at any time of the year.

Complaints have also focused on telephone etiquette: staff members who should identify themselves or their departments when answering, and should do so in a polite and professional way. Committee members, themselves, have experienced greetings such as, “Yeah?” or “What?” As ill-mannered as this habit is, the solution is remarkably simple, takes little effort, and costs no money: telephones should be answered — pleasantly — with the name of the department or the individual.

It also is distressing that, despite numerous messages from administration, some departments and individuals continue to identify themselves as being from “SUNY Farmingdale.” This remains confusing to callers, or students and parents, who appear in person, and wonder whether they are at the right college. For several years now, the campus has identified itself in all external messaging as “Farmingdale State College.” Departments that send out materials, posters, or answer the telephone using any other name create confusion in the public image and among prospective students.

**Enhance the Aesthetic Environment**

The campus is in the midst of a $185 million construction and renovation project and, as a result, is undergoing an extraordinary transformation in its physical appearance. A new Campus Center is expected to open in 2012. Other important construction will include, or has already included, a School of Business building, renovations to Hale and Lupton Halls, an Information Commons, refurbishment of athletic facilities, roadway re-configuration, and many other improvements.

As important as these projects are, they will not, themselves, create a dynamic student life or improve services.

Creating a pleasing environment means doing more than just constructing new buildings — it means leveraging the space, comforts, and amenities of these buildings as part of a comprehensive re-tooling of the student experience.

If students are dissatisfied with a particular service, moving that service to a new location will not automatically resolve the issue. It can, however, be part of the solution. The effort made to beautify the campus and keep it adequately groomed has been a valuable step in making Farmingdale more welcoming to students and visitors, as well as an aid in the marketing of the College.
As the construction plans evolve, the design of strategically placed areas that will ignite student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions — gardens, benches, tables — would be another great asset. We now have an opportunity to be more thoughtful in this regard.

Such a plan should also include consideration for where to enhance campus lighting, as well as where to place lounges, common areas, and snack/beverage stops for students who are en route to class. The campus must ensure that key student service areas that are used in the evenings are well-lit for the safety of students and visitors.

In addition, we suggest that the administration evaluate the effectiveness of campus signage and identify where improvements in this area may be needed, especially considering that the College is centrally-located and, therefore, frequently used as a site for many community events, public hearings, athletic competitions, theme shows, artistic performances, and the like.
Assess Organizational Relationships

As the College grows, administrative offices are added, functions change, and new models emerge, so there is sufficient cause to at least re-assess the way the College is organized.

Here is the current organization chart for the College:
While an overhaul of this structure is unnecessary, certain modifications may make sense in the future. For example, there has been discussion about the need for additional personnel in institutional research. Other suggestions have included a full-time staff member to administer and create campus events and to schedule outside event usage due to growing demand. Some of these issues have been the subject of regular meetings held by the College Planning and Resource Allocation Committee. Careful thought needs to be given about where any potential positions should reside in the organization chart as they are created.

As part of a more integrated administration, stronger relationships should be encouraged, so that campus offices work in a more cooperative and informed fashion. A collegial tone will create a more effective environment and become a necessity as the College flourishes. In some areas, this process has already begun.

For example, the Office of Campus Housing selected and trained students as tour guides for the Spring Open House, a collaborative effort with Admissions that produced positive results. Campus events such as the Garden Festival, Earth Day, the Asian American Festival, and alumni activities have been created and executed with strong cooperation among administrative departments, academic departments, faculty, and volunteers from the College.

As the renovation of the campus infrastructure is accelerated, the requirements of Physical Plant will have an increasing impact on academic and other departments, and a similar spirit of teamwork between many different areas of responsibility will become essential.

Likewise, offices such as Institutional Advancement, Auxiliary Services Corporation, and Corporate Development — while not always having a direct impact on students or prospective students — should evaluate how they can work better with campus-wide departments to enhance communication on important topics. These topics may include campus events, housing issues, scholarships, community engagement, internships, wellness programs, and fellowship opportunities.
**Invest in Technology**

One of the many positives in surveys that have been conducted about campus operations is the response to the College’s ability to provide up-to-date technology and IT support services. This was a focus of both a Middle States campus-wide survey and the ACT Student Opinion Survey. The results are encouraging.

From the Middle States Survey:
*Question: Are adequate technology resources (such as computer, technology enhanced classrooms, etc.) provided for students?* See results in Figure A.

In the ACT survey, students were asked about *computer support services*. See results in Figure B.

In the ACT survey, students were asked about the *college computer network*. See results in Figure C.

Yet, we recognize that technology improves at a rapid rate and, as a college of technology and applied science, it is essential that Farmingdale continue to advance in this area. Enrollment growth, faculty growth, and the continuous updating and “leapfrogging” of technology requires the College to be vigilant and plan for investments in new technology and necessary staffing to implement improvements so that Farmingdale can meet the needs of the next generation of students in this important area. These investments will be critical in efforts to expand electronic communications with students and automate certain functions that are important to student registration and enrollment.

**Make Student Government Transparent**

Student Government performs an important function: engaging students in campus activities, supporting student clubs, contributing to campus life, and acting in many other valuable roles. This has not been easy for Farmingdale’s Student Government, considering the history of the campus, first as a two-year institution into the 1980s, and now as a baccalaureate institution with a small resident population.

Over the past few years there has been considerable criticism of FSG from students and even from some Student Senators, themselves. In fact, the 2007 Student Affairs and Services Committee Report expressed concerns about the operations of Student Government. Yet, there has been refreshing progress in FSG under the current leadership and a new willingness to work cooperatively with other areas of the campus. While the operations of the FSG are improving, continued demonstrable progress will be critical as enrollment continues to grow and as the resident population increases.

It is also important to recognize the good service FSG provides to the College in terms of supporting events, programs, scholarships, and charitable organizations. In fact, FSG sometimes donates funds...
to support efforts that are ordinarily financed by a college's operating budget, including stipends for the Tutoring Center, Counseling Center, hockey club, and other campus organizations and offices. All of these activities reflect positively on Farmingdale, and FSG is to be commended.

A key area where FSG is lacking is in communication. Many students perceive the organization as insular, making decisions with insufficient notification to the student body — or notification in ways that simply are not effective. Students say they are not informed enough in advance about elections, choices on spending are made without enough discussion, and that they have little input in the decision-making process when speakers are invited to campus.

In fact, FSG sometimes acts more like a program board than a student government, paying significant sums of money to celebrities for appearances, yet failing to develop a series of scholarly visits. In both 2008-09 and 2009-10, no historically relevant speakers or lectures were scheduled to celebrate Black History Month or Women's History Month (when an actress with no particular relevance was invited). There has not been a diverse group of speakers of general student interest — a government official, media personality, entrepreneur — sponsored by FSG in several years. It is troubling that the performers and TV celebrities who are invited, and paid, are booked through the same talent agency time after time.

It is important for FSG to work cooperatively with administration. It is also the responsibility of the College's Student Activities office to work effectively with FSG and student clubs in order to leverage resources the campus can provide and the guidance key administrators can give. While student governments typically have — and should have — a high degree of autonomy, FSG's goal should be to become more transparent and expand participation in student government, an area where it is currently lacking.

**Replicate Good Models**

There are many departments and individuals that are productive, resourceful and who perform quality work despite a shortage of staff or funding. These areas find ways to maximize their resources, re-engineer their work flow, and overcome obstacles through creativity and imagination. Such examples should be used as models for others in the College, and as a way to stimulate debate on new and inventive approaches.

Among these examples, we find several especially worth citing and emulating:

Nursing is among several departments who require their students to join the academic-related club, fostering camaraderie among those enrolled in the program. Horticulture is especially active in promoting and supporting student achievement, and Criminal Justice requires faculty to attend at least one student-focused departmental event annually as a demonstration of their commitment.

Likewise, we are encouraged by a new software program that will allow students to reserve textbooks from the Bookstore at the same time they are completing their online registration for courses. The program allows students to review textbook requirements and provides an online purchase option. The ease and convenience of this process is entirely in the spirit of Students First, and the efforts of the Auxiliary Services Corporation in this regard deserve praise.

And Athletics ranks consistently high in developing a sense of community, with student-athletes among the best in terms of social engagement in the campus.
Specific Recommendations

1. Conduct an Annual Review of Policies

Campus policies that relate to critical student service areas — i.e. residential housing, food service, registrar, financial aid, library, admissions, etc. — should be reviewed by the supervisory Vice President along with the department head on an annual basis. Additions, deletions, modifications, and recommendations to establish new policies or discontinue existing ones should be forwarded to the President for consideration. Student input should be sought during the process of considering changes in these policies.

2. Assess the Quality of Student Service

Key student service areas should make presentations on their Student First efforts to the Cabinet, or to a panel the President may elect to convene, on an annual basis, with a special focus on recommendations contained in this report and as directed by the President. These presentations should include an overview of the departmental operations and responsibilities, challenges faced by the department in relation to providing an enhanced level of student service, and areas identified for improvement. Regular Town Hall meetings with students should be held to assist in assessment.

3. Provide Performance Counseling and Training for Staff

A series of presentations designed for supervisors and personnel in student service areas should be conducted by customer-service professionals. These presentations should be mandatory for all personnel identified by supervisors and/or by the appropriate Vice President. In addition, employees in need of counseling regarding their behavior in providing services to students should be identified by supervisors and such counseling should be implemented with the goal of changing and improving the behavior.

4. Create Accountability

A one-year status report should be issued by the President in early 2012 on the results of Students First and the progress the campus is making in responding to recommendations contained in this document, with an understanding of financial realities that currently exist. A review of critical student service departments should be conducted by the President and by the supervisory Vice Presidents every two years, with expectations for specific improvements to be issued to the department supervisor. The Students First committee should act in an advisory role at the outset of the first review.
5. Establish a Campus Communications Policy

A frequent complaint is that students cannot reach staff by phone. While automation is necessary and efficient, steps must be taken so that issues requiring human resolution ensure that office personnel are accessible. A campus communication policy should be enacted to include the following:

- All academic and administrative office telephones that serve students and/or the general public are required to connect to voicemail.
- All college staff telephones are required to connect to voicemail.
- All voicemail messages should be clear and up-to-date.
- All departmental phones in administrative and academic offices should be answered either with the name of the individual, or with the name of the department.
- Antiquated phones should be replaced so that all offices can implement voicemail.
- Office hours of all key administrative and academic department offices must be posted on the department's page on the College web site.

As part of enhancing telephone service, an evaluation of telephone needs and potential modernization should be conducted in key departments such as Registrar, Student Accounts, and Admissions.

6. Develop Long-Term/Short Term Staffing Plans

Many student service areas are challenged by staffing shortages. A practical, long-term staffing plan should be developed for student service areas by the President and the Vice Presidents in consultation with the relevant departments. This plan should consider projected enrollment, budget, trends, peak periods, and College initiatives so that the vision and strategic planning of the College is supported by necessary staff in areas that most often provide student services. A staffing recommendation should be required by supervisors of relevant departments in 2011.

7. Institute Integrated Staffing

An evaluation of how the organization interacts should take place to enhance the cooperation and integration of Admissions, Student Recruitment, and the Registrar (which report to one Vice President) with Financial Aid and Student Accounts (which report to another Vice President). Seamless interaction with students must be the objective. Cross-training of staff in related departments should be conducted so that basic questions from students can be answered by personnel in all these areas. With some departments reporting they cannot reach “sister” departments at key times in the enrollment/admissions process, it is evident that there must be greater cooperation and communication among these departments, with regular meetings including all of them to evaluate operational strengths and weaknesses. An appropriate campus administrator should have responsibility for convening these meetings.
8. Enhance Academic Advisement

Departmental advisement is currently fragmented. There are some chairs who do not, or will not, advise new students over the summer, and classes are closed by the time these students come to campus for registration — a situation that should be unacceptable. Many chairs and faculty are not trained in Banner. In addition, some Chairs and faculty are not aware of placement criteria, admission criteria, and the transfer credit process — and they are unaware of how dropping, withdrawing, or receiving an incomplete can have an impact on a student's financial package and eligibility for future aid. We understand that a cooperative, campus-wide effort is now underway by Academic Department Chairs to develop a consistent system of academic advisement. Their plan should include a comprehensive method for first semester advisement for new students that will adequately address their needs and establish a foundation for their academic success.

This plan should also address staffing, timing, training, accessibility, and potential automation — as well as enabling faculty to register students at the time of advisement. Procedures should also be established for advising evening and part-time students, so that convenient appointments are available for these constituencies. We strongly urge the adopting of a campus-wide policy to review transcripts and notify students of courses needed to complete degree requirements once they have reached a certain threshold — perhaps 79-88 credits.

9. Engage Student Government

As a college with a predominantly commuter population, Farmingdale faces challenges in sustaining a dynamic campus life. Under new leadership, the Student Government has shown marked progress over the last year, supporting many campus organizations and engaging in valuable community service. But it is not currently maximizing its potential to be a force in creating student involvement; therefore, the way in which FSG is organized and functions suggest that a re-evaluation is in order. Currently, FSG employs a full-time staff person to act as an adviser and in an operations capacity; that salary — determined by FSG — is funded by student fees. As a result, the administration has little opportunity to influence FSG in positive ways and to ensure that the student fees it receives are being used to the best advantage of the student population. This position should be brought under the Office of Student Affairs and funded by the College to act in an advisory capacity and to better address the interests of students, while allowing FSG to retain sufficient autonomy.

10. Address Lighting, Signage and Parking

Improved lighting of areas should be implemented at key campus locations, including University Police, Lupton Hall, Conklin Hall, Roosevelt Hall Quad, and the Nold Hall parking lot. We also recommend that the “Farmingdale State College” signs at the entrances from Route 110 and Melville Road be lighted to better identify the College at night, and that a lighted sign be placed at the University Police entrance. We understand that with ongoing construction projects some enhanced lighting may be delayed until renovations are complete. Signage should be consistent in color and language throughout campus and reflect correct and current terminology (for instance, the Residence Life Office was changed to the Office of Campus Housing six years ago, but the sign at Sinclair Hall does not reflect that change). Signage also should be updated to better direct students and the public, especially around heavily-trafficked areas such as Roosevelt Hall and Knapp Hall.
In order to minimize confusion, the College should better differentiate and clarify the functions contained in Horton Hall and those located at Laffin Hall. Student parking should be made more convenient and accessible wherever possible, particularly in the lots near Horton Hall, where staff parking often goes unused. A bus shelter and University Police emergency phone should be installed outside Laffin to better protect students who use public transportation to and from the campus.

11. **Mandate Weather Emergency Procedures**

Academic departments should be mandated to keep students informed during snow and other weather emergencies. Personnel or voicemail messages in academic departments should advise students of pertinent academic issues (i.e. exams, clinical training, etc.) that may be affected by weather conditions or other emergencies. Full-time and part-time faculty should be regularly advised by Chairs in anticipation of an emergency that instructors cannot unilaterally cancel individual classes when the College is in session. However, the committee recognizes there may be extenuating circumstances that cause class cancellations; in such cases, there should be departmental protocols in place to provide reasonable notification to affected students.

12. **Expand Online Services**

In order to enhance communication with students, the integrating of students’ e-mail accounts into a web site portal should be explored in order to encourage use of Farmingdale.edu accounts. Automated course auditing to ensure that students are taking the proper courses — and that they are being taken in sequential order — as well as automation of other relevant registrar and admission functions — should be achieved. These steps may require IT investment in staff, and developing additional IT resources should be addressed. Additionally, the Auxiliary Service Corporation should establish an online FAQ as well as a generic e-mail address so that students can get timely answers to pertinent questions regarding contractual services that the department is responsible for addressing. Where appropriate, other departments should create online FAQs for students. Student e-news should be more attractively designed and campus e-news should be re-organized so that specific events and news can be more easily located. Staffing in Instructional Technology should be increased consistent with course growth.

13. **Plan for Growth in Resident Housing**

As the campus resident population — including international enrollment — continues to grow, the Office of Campus Housing will become a focus of the campus experience for these students. The College should address Housing policies, specifically the current closures during vacation periods, so that this cohort of students can be adequately served. This may necessitate a re-engineering of policies and practices as well as the hiring of additional staff or the development of new performance programs. The policy of restricting residential visits to one guest at a time should also be re-considered as a means to foster social interactions. In addition, the organization of the Inter-Dormitory Council should be addressed. The IDC is now based in Student Government — not in Campus Housing — and, as a result, there is little effective communication between the IDC and housing staff members. Nor is there an election process for IDC board members, who are appointed by the outgoing IDC president. Formal, elected representation for resident students must be created to provide them with a “voice” that will contribute to the enhancement of their housing experience.
14. **Focus on Transfer Students’ Needs**

Transfer students are valuable to the College and figure prominently in enrollment strategies, yet there is much that can be done to make them feel more welcome to the campus and to ease their transition. For instance, transfer credits should be recognized in the registration process. This currently does not happen in the Banner system and, as a result, some transfer students can be disenfranchised from early registration. In addition, integrated “one-stop shopping” by appointment for transfer students — perhaps through a series of “Transfer Student Days” — should be implemented so acceptance, registration and advisement can be incorporated together, with the cooperation and support of academic areas. Only one staff member currently is assigned to transfer credit evaluation, an issue that must be addressed if the College hopes to process the applications and enrollment of transfer students in a timely manner.

15. **Publish a Student Newspaper Regularly**

As previously noted in this report, the lack of a viable student newspaper results in a failure to keep students informed about events and developments at the College, and also detracts from the image of the campus. A campus newspaper, though funded by Student Government, should have autonomy, elect its own officers, and must not be subject to FSG censorship. If students cannot be organized to regularly publish a student newspaper, FSG should work with the appropriate individuals and campus departments to consider funding the printing of the online newspaper currently being produced by the Professional Communications Department. This should be done with the understanding such a publication is part of the academic program and that, where appropriate, the instructor will assign and grade articles that appear in the paper as part of the scholarly enterprise.

16. **Maintain a Good Campus Appearance**

The campus has taken great strides in its beautification efforts, despite the obstacles of a massive renovation and rehabilitation of many buildings. As the appearance of the College is important to student recruitment and public perception, these efforts must continue. General beautification should take place in and around the residential halls, and amenities such as volleyball courts and an additional basketball court should be located in proximity to Orchard Hall to encourage residential student interactions. These new recreational areas should be lighted to stimulate evening use. Old picnic tables that are placed randomly around the campus should be removed, and permanent benches and tables, with shading, should be strategically placed — again, with an emphasis on resident halls and academic buildings. Dumpsters in plain view of areas trafficked by students, prospective students, parents, and visitors, such as the one at the parking lot beside Roosevelt Hall, should be moved to more discreet locations.

17. **Create a Scheduling and Events Manager Position**

The College is organizing, hosting, and making its facilities available for an increasing number of student, campus, and community events. The addition of the Campus Center will increase the number of desired campus venues. A full-time scheduling and events manager position should be created not only to book events, but also to create and manage them, and interface with all relevant departments and constituencies (i.e. Student Government, Physical Plant, Food Service, Institutional Advancement, etc.) to ensure the success of the event and the satisfaction of the client, all with the goal of creating a dynamic and engaged student experience.
18. Improve the Promotion of Scholarships

Naturally, scholarships are important to existing students and vital to the recruitment of prospective students. We understand that a further re-design of the web site by the Office for Institutional Advancement is currently in process. In order to better promote available funding to support students, the SF committee recommends that this re-design incorporate a direct and prominent home page link to scholarship information. In addition, the scholarship web site administered by Corporate Development should be more frequently updated so that students and prospective students have the most up-to-date information.

19. Re-evaluate Space for Student Service Areas

As with many colleges, office space at Farmingdale is at a premium, especially with some space shifted offline due to renovation. In the Writing Center, for example, six tutors and a secretary share a single room. In Student Accounts, the office is not designed to offer privacy to students when discussing financial issues. Due to these cramped conditions, the department is also required to move to Gleeson Hall during in-person registration, which is both inconvenient and inefficient. With anticipated growth in years to come, student service areas must have adequate — and, in some cases, this means additional — space. A study of reasonable space requirements should be commenced that can addresses this issue, and others like it, so that staffs can have the space they need to function properly and students are treated in an appropriate environment.

20. Invite More Input on Food Service

The quality of food service on college campuses is a common topic of conversation among students. This is also the case with Farmingdale. The vast majority — 60 per cent — describe their “overall experience” with the food service at Knapp Hall as “average,” according to a Spring 2009 survey of 125 respondents (although it is noteworthy and encouraging that only 12 per cent described their experience as “poor”).

A more significant problem is the communication of food service options, even though food service has been historically responsive to students needs. Many students do not seem to realize that Aramark is flexible when students have specific dietary requirements, and that it makes accommodations for students who have classes during dinner hours. Although there have been periodic discussions with students about food service operations, these meetings are poorly attended. A more reliable system of gathering input from students should be implemented so that any appropriate suggestions and concerns can be addressed, and so food quality and delivery can meet reasonable expectations.
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