

Student Recruitment and Retention

Working Group Report

University Strategic Planning Committee
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Method:

The working group reviewed retention rate data by geographic area, Q-score (combined ACT/SAT and high school GPA), race/ethnicity, class, and developmental course enrollment; Q-scores of applicants, enrollees, United States college retention rates, and Black college retention rates. The group also met with Dr. Adrian Woods from the office of Academic Enhancement and invited her to join the group, and Sondra Reine and Winston Brown from the office of Admissions.

Quantitative Analysis

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Xavier's enrollment was growing at a steady pace. In August, 2005, 1007 freshmen enrolled. The average number of freshmen students per year between 2001 and 2005 was 944. After Katrina, 442 freshmen enrolled in 2006 and 664 enrolled in 2007. The Office of Admissions has a target enrollment for 2008-09 of 800. They would like to see enrollment at a pre-Katrina level by 2010.

From 2002-2005, the percentage of freshmen coming from the "South" (which includes Louisiana and New Orleans), continuously declined from 67% in 2002 to 57% in 2005. After Katrina, the trend reversed. Over 80% of Xavier's students came from the "South" in 2006 and 2007. In 2007, 309 out of the 664 came from within commuting distance. The majority of freshmen declare majors in the natural sciences and mathematics.

In terms of academic preparedness, in 2007 26% of entering freshmen had high school GPAs of 3.0 or higher and ACT or SAT equivalent of 25 or higher (top Q). In the three years before Katrina this percentage averaged 14%. Also in 2007 34% of entering freshmen had high school GPAs of less than 3.0 and ACT or SAT equivalent of less than 25 (bottom Q). In the three years before Katrina this percentage averaged 42%. While this may suggest more students in the mid or top Q range, it is too early to tell if this is an aberration or not. Additionally, the average percentage of students between 2001 and 2006 who took developmental courses their first semester averaged 35.8%. The class of 2005 had the lowest overall rate of developmental courses at 27%. In the fall of 2006, 50% of freshmen took developmental courses; this is the highest overall rate from 2001 to 2006.

There is a substantial gap in retention between freshmen who take developmental courses and those who do not. Year 2 retention for all freshmen ranged between 75-80% between 1999 and 2006 (not counting the 2004 cohort). However, if we break the freshmen into two groups: those taking developmental course and those not taking

developmental courses, we see a different pattern. Year 2 retention for freshmen taking a developmental course averaged 68% while those who did not take a developmental course averaged 83% between 2001 and 2006 not counting the 2004 cohort. There is no academic credit for taking developmental courses and subsequently, graduation gets delayed. This may possibly cause students to abandon their studies at Xavier and drop out.

Compared to other schools across the country, Xavier's first year retention rate of 76% falls about 10 percentage points below the highest HBCUs (Howard and Spellman, 88 and 87% respectively) and 10 above the local HBCU (Dillard, 66%). Comparing Xavier with public schools in the state of Louisiana, Xavier's first year retention rate falls 8 percentage points below LSU (84) and 6 percentage points above Southern University (70) and 21 above UNO.

In an effort to assist underprepared freshmen, a grant was written to increase recruitment and retention of STEM majors (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Experiential Problem Solving and Analytical Reasoning (EPSAR), a component of the NSF-sponsored grant, enables up to 50 students to take a 6 week intensive problem solving course in the summers. At the end of the course, they then take the math placement test to see if they would need to take the developmental math course. The grant also includes math tutoring. In the first year (2005) of the program, 24 students participated and 20 (83%) qualified for the degree credit math course at the end of the program. Due to Katrina only 10 students returned to Xavier in January, 2006. Of the ten, 7 passed the Pre-Calculus course (Math 1030). Of those seven, 3 passed Calculus 1. In the second year (2007), 39 students participated and 24 qualified for degree credit. Twelve of those students took Pre-Calculus (Math 1030), with 6 successfully completing the course. This grant continues to 2009.

The Office of Academic Enhancement has proposed a plan to offer students who need developmental math an opportunity to take it during a 6 week summer session beginning Summer, 2009.

Concerning recruitment, the Office of Admissions identifies a cadre of prospective students each year by: purchasing lists of names of African American high school students, attending college fairs, and receiving requests from Xavier's website, among other things. They have purchased a new software system that tracks these prospective students. The office sends several mailings throughout the year that deal with the university in general. In January, the office gives each academic department a list of students who have applied and declared majors. Each academic department may communicate with these students by e-mail, phone and snail mail to give them more specific information about the department and the degree. Some departments, like Biology-Pre Med, are very organized in their communications.

The Office of Admissions has a modest budget from which they can offer students with certain high school GPAs and ACT/SAT test scores academic scholarships. The Admissions counselors put viable financial packages together for prospective students.

Qualitative Analysis

Xavier has always strived to assist students who may not have had the opportunity to achieve a college education. Xavier's niche is to prepare students to assume roles of leadership and service in society. Xavier's success is reflected in the large number of graduates who go on to graduate and professional schools and become physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, musicians, writers, and much more. Historically, Xavier has focused on African American students; however, over the years, Asians, Hispanics, Africans, Whites and members from other nationalities have been attending.

Since Hurricane Katrina more students live off-campus and commute to school. This has changed the needs of the student body. Some students see a decline in community spirit as a result of this. In addition, according to a survey conducted by Xavier University, students commented on the lack of various amenities on campus. They are: not enough fun activities, little sports/athletic/workout facilities, not enough Greek activities, condition of some dorms and classrooms, library does not meet students' needs, little beverage and food choices, lack of brand name food and beverage products. Another comment that has been made is the lack of awareness of campus events. Posters are put up around campus, but many students do not see them for various reasons. There is a television in the student center lobby; however, it does not run information about upcoming events.

To address a concern about beverages, the library has offered free coffee during final exam period for the past two semesters.

The possibility of recruiting more Top Q students was discussed. It may not be feasible to attract more top students because, according to Dr. Akundi and Mr. Brown, top students are being recruited by other universities who can offer them better financial incentives.

There certainly are other reasons why students do not stay to graduate. These may include finances, poor fit between the individual and the institution, personal problems, and other issues. This committee did not have the time to delve into some of these other reasons.

Issues

From the discussions of the working group two questions arise: Where should Xavier focus its recruiting energy and who should Xavier focus its recruitment and retention energy on? While Xavier's reputation remains intact, people across the country may not be content with the status of New Orleans at this point. Parents may not be comfortable with sending their children to school here, knowing that the city is still in the process of being rebuilt. Because of this, the working group recommends that Xavier focuses its recruiting energies, at least in the near future, on New Orleans, Louisiana and the southern U.S.

As to the "who" question, Xavier has a history of admitting students who may not be as academically prepared as those who attend other colleges and universities. It also appears that if Xavier does not accept students needing developmental courses, there would be over 1/3 fewer students coming here. This group recommends that the plan proposed by the office of Academic Enhancement to offer developmental math in the

summer be put into action. We also recommend that the EPSAR grant continue and other developmental courses are offered in the summer.

Because Xavier's focus is predominately African American, recruiting has not traditionally centered on other groups. In light of its mission in preparing students for roles of leadership and service in society, Xavier needs to become more global in its definition of "society" and thus encourage individuals from other underrepresented groups to attend.

The Office of Admissions has a well-thought-out plan of recruitment; however, issues remain. As noted above, the national image of the city is still in need of improvement, the office cannot offer as many academic scholarships as it would like, and underrepresented degree areas have room in their programs for more students. This committee recommends that the budget be doubled for scholarships focusing on mid-level students, especially for underrepresented degree areas. The committee recommends increasing the budget for advertising, for example, on a web search engine, or in college guidebooks. The committee recommends that Xavier bulletins be sent out to prospective students, parents, and high school counselors on a regular basis. The committee recommends that there be liaisons from each department who have release time for recruiting activities.

Goals/Objectives/Metrics

In the next 3-5 years, Xavier University will develop an educational environment that assists students in their successful matriculation.

Objective	Metric
In 5 years, retention rate will increase by 10%	Number of students who take and pass Dev. Math during summer; Compare freshmen retention rate with previous cohorts each year; Compare retention rates of students taking developmental courses with those not taking developmental courses; Number of other developmental courses offered in summer; support other initiatives offered by office of Academic Enhancement

In the next 3-5 years, Xavier University will enroll an optimum number of students, given the university's capabilities and resources, which will provide them with a quality education.

Objective	Metric
Improve facilities	Document all dorm and classroom upgrades

Objective	Metric
Widen variety of food and beverage choices on campus	Install café in library; offer name brand food and beverage outlets, such as Taco Bell, Starbucks or local restaurants, such as Dunbar's Soul Food, CC's Coffee, Reginelli's Pizza
Improve athletic facilities	Build gym
Increase media visibility	Increase number of materials sent to high schools; increase number of high school visitations; make Herald online easy to access; maintain Facebook page;
Increase scholarship budget	Increase communication with alumni and stress need for scholarships; investigate other sources of scholarships
Increase number of other underrepresented groups, such as Hispanics and Asians	Widen cadre of prospective students
Increase visibility of all academic programs	Monthly newsletter focusing on different academic majors and success stories; Advertise high success rate of graduates in all areas