An Agenda for Change:
Developing the Mānoa Student Engagement, Retention, & Graduation (SERG) Plan
September, 2013

INTRODUCTION

For the last seven years, a great deal of attention has focused on creating a student success plan that brings together best practices of student engagement, improving retention and assisting students making progress to degree. A small committee is now prepared to argue that the time is right to not merely centralize the various student success initiatives, but initiate a campus culture transformation with a comprehensive and coherent master plan. Specifically, we are proposing a UHM SERG Plan with a clear focus on campus-wide goals and objectives. This SERG Plan will require leadership and commitment from everyone on campus and a clear articulation of each step as we move forward. It is Mānoa’s time to shine and become the campus it is capable of offering to the people of the State of Hawaii, to the community of states in the Republic, and the global nations of the world. We believe this plan is a major step in the commitment to that excellence.

THE PLAN:

1. We believe the UHM Chancellor should endorse a comprehensive, campus-wide initiative to increase student engagement, improve retention, and shorten time to completion.
   a. The plan should have top level endorsement of a common theme and language that will be used by entire campus. The core values we wish to promote include aloha, community (kaiaulu), and stewardship (ahupua’a).
   b. The Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs should be designated the chief officer at Mānoa on engagement, retention, and graduation issues.
   c. The plan should focus on realistic goals, grounded on reliable data that can be shared and discussed by the entire campus.
   d. A financial commitment should be made by the Chancellor with a specific amount to ensure funding and campus commitment to the campus agreed initiatives.
   e. The entire campus should be a “gathering place for the development of scholars” and have everyone on campus recognize and commit to supporting that mission.
   f. Finally, and most importantly, everyone must be on the “same” page, i.e. make an understanding that a “student focused culture” is a part of everyone’s performance review, and a Desirable Qualification for EVERY position on campus.

2. The Committee recommends the creation of a new Student Engagement/Retention/Graduation Council (SERG) with the VCAA deciding on membership. We recommend:
a. A campus wide collaboration and buy-in of the goals and process of SERG.
b. Include student leaders, MIRO, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Council of Academic Advising, and alumni on the committee.
c. SERG will have funding to identify and immediately address “hot spots” and quick fixes (e.g., more staffing and cameras to complete student ID's during Warrior Week and the first week of school)

3. The primary goal of SERG is to create a comprehensive engagement/retention plan.
   a. SERG will develop a multi-layered approach with short-, medium-, and long-term goals at both concrete and more abstract levels
   b. SERG will aggregate retention efforts/synthesize and develop a clear focus.
   c. SERG will build assessment efforts to evaluate initiatives
   d. SERG will discontinue underperforming efforts and identify and utilize resources for more successful initiatives
   e. SERG will develop professional development focusing on an inclusive, best performance campus with a solid student-focused climate
   f. SERG’s preliminary foci of the retention plan:
      i. Develop structures/programs to help students find a major
      ii. Help students map out requirements and develop strategies for students to stay with their academic plan
      iii. Develop programs that strengthen student accountability
      iv. Clarify, streamline, “fix” administrative processes and procedures to facilitate academic progress
      v. Continue to develop an inclusive and student-focused climate.
      vi. Develop a Student Support Network to help students deal with non-academic issues.

4. SERG will claim the year 2014 as the year of “campus engagement” with a series of initiatives focusing on engaging student and employees.
   a. Administering NSSE and FSSE to hear student and faculty’s voices about student engagement.
   b. Conduct the first Student Engagement Summit to share best practices and conduct related trainings and workshops.

5. SERG major parallel initiatives with important campus wide features:
   a. Professional training
      i. Need to infuse a student-centered approach across all parts of the campus community including faculty, staff, parking attendants, cashier’s office, financial aid, and all offices that come into contact with students.
      ii. Workshops for students on how to negotiate the university and to maximize their stay resulting in successful completion of the degree.
   b. Public relations
i. Develop a goal/vision motto with inclusive language.

ii. Widely share the vision throughout the campus and community (e.g. have a team of speakers to reach out to the community to speak at luncheons and receptions.

iii. Include the undergraduate experience equally as part of UHM’s television advertising picture.

c. Employee/Faculty/Staff engagement and satisfaction
   i. Acknowledge the importance of employee satisfaction to student retention.
   ii. Conduct the first employee satisfaction survey to identify areas to improve.
   iii. Create recognition incentive awards for employees that “make a difference.” Highlight a student and an employee each month as someone who cares, and make it mean something.
   iv. Develop campus wide initiatives that become the main theme for a semester (e.g., simple ideas like saying “Good morning to five strangers on the way to your office.”)

d. Plan a major event at the end of the year to celebrate successes and announce new goals for next year.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The central focus on much of the SERG work is culture change...finding a way to re-invent the campus and its professional presentation to its most important participants, its students. Ultimately, the task is making the students the strongest advocates for the culture change we have begun.

This work can be fun, and rewarding. The key will be the buy-in from the campus leadership and the example they set for everyone.

Krystyna Aune, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
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