

Minutes – Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention Committee
September 29, 2006

Attendees: Sarah Egerstrom, Don Leake, Ashley Olson, Natalie Hagberg, Dan Marchand, Alan Tuchtenhagen, David Trechter

1. Reviewed and approve minutes from September 7, 2006
2. First-Year Experience Program
 - a. **Description** – proposal sent to System based on suggestions from an ad hoc, faculty-staff-student task force. In summer 2006, Sarah Egerstrom and Miriam Huffman were named co-chairs of this 2-year initiative. Currently trying to identify what has already been done on campus and collecting data to see what they tell us about who/why students are not staying with us. Now in early stages of planning and assessing and will be coming forth with a plan for the remainder of the project. Marchand worked on task force and is excited about this effort. Task force looked at best practices. Need to identify what is best fit for UW-River Falls. Key is getting links to faculty and their engagement in this effort. Marchand noted that we have had a number of programs in the past but many (e.g. Pigeon Lake) have been discontinued because of funding issues. Proposal is seeking funding for faculty release time. Marchand – are we going to have an identifiable “First Year Experience Office”? This has not yet decided. Trechter – where are we on the spectrum of best to worst practices re first year experiences. Egerstrom, we have a number of the pieces but they aren’t coordinated. In some universities they focus on learning communities and other programs to increase interaction/connections with students outside of classrooms and we don’t have these types of things. Lots of different practices out there re how we teach, house, advise, admit first year students and “best” approach depends upon specific campus culture. Marchand noted that two years ago this committee looked at the contact process with students from when they first contact us through their first year – found that we were doing many of the recommended things but it wasn’t coordinated. Egerstrom noted need to infuse the idea of a first-year experience into campus culture. Now have a weekly first-year student newsletter going out to freshmen and more communications with parents also. Tuchtenhagen, this is likely to be more of a co-ordinating year rather than an implementation year for this initiative – e.g. how can we improve and make more effective the academic alert system as part of this initiative. We are still asking fundamental questions about the nature of this program. Olson – notes that navigating the financial aid office/website is very difficult/confusing, especially for first generation students. Hagberg – need to go to the freshman rather than expecting them to come to an office; freshmen don’t necessarily want to admit they need help.
 - b. **Brainstorming** – faculty engagement - Some departments have contests that, in order to qualify for a prize, freshmen have to visit their academic advisor within the first two weeks of class. Perhaps we need to develop some suggested

questions for faculty members to ask their first-year advisees. Advising visit is intimidating for students, need to find ways to reduce this stress. Making sure that advisors really know how to advise also important – advisors don't always show up on time or make assumptions about the students' level of knowledge that is too great. Faculty advisors need to know to whom to refer students for various problems (financial aid, counseling, etc.). It is intimidating that advisors are "Dr." so and so. Perhaps need a newsletter for faculty from first year experience re advising in general and especially for freshmen. Should we encourage group advising – where several freshmen meet with an advisor at one time?

Reaching out to freshmen – going out to first-year wings in res halls to do focus groups. One effective way may be to send real, paper mail that is addressed to the individual freshman. Have someone available at "Weeks of Welcome" events who is there to answer questions (e.g. wearing tee-shirts "Ask me a question!"). Have clubs or departments/programs do an "adopt a freshman" program (mentoring program). Don – reaching out can't be artificial and needs to focus on the "non-joiners", the socially isolated. First year wings are attractive but may be impractical. There are pros and cons to this – if its only freshmen it can be a whole bunch of people who don't know what they are doing and how to get involved. Starting to look at the academic profile of students who don't return, Sarah will return with this info when available.

3. Trechter proposed that this committee spend some time talking about growth and building off of the memo "Growth Opportunities" that was distributed by Tuchtenhagen.