



**President's
Student Services Retreat I
December 8, 2003**

OVERVIEW

**Prepared by the
Center for Organizational Development
and Leadership**



RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Introduction

The “Concerns and Suggestions Overview” document that follows lists student concerns and suggested improvements noted at the President’s Student Services Retreat I. As a way of organizing the voluminous information, suggested improvements are organized within five thematic areas:

- 1) Insufficient Focus on Student Needs
- 2) Need for Enhanced Academic Support
- 3) Absence of Effective Feedback Mechanisms on Services
- 4) Need for Enhanced Communication/Information
- 5) Need for Improved Process & Service Approaches

In those cases where particular suggestions touch upon more than one theme, those suggestions have been placed within the one theme that seemed most appropriate.

Theme 1: Insufficient Focus on Student Needs

(Lack of civility, staff runaround, lack of caring attitude, lack of explanation of decisions, lack of emphasis on relationship building, need for personalized service, need for improved facilities)

Suggested Improvement

<p>Articulate shared goals/philosophy/standards – "Students First."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop service credo.• Develop service contracts for staff.• Promote a stronger orientation to RU mission.• Clarify service expectations for faculty, staff, and students.• Use to instill a commitment to service, to review annual performance, and as a way to require accountability.• Promote staff commitment to helping students solve problems even when it's not in their area (clarify issues, find exact person and phone number, and call the student back).• Empower university offices to advocate for students with other units.
<p>Create ombudsperson – ID individual and organizational problems; bringing information to President. Establish peer groups for problem-solving.</p>
<p>Promote affiliation by students with one or more student organization...find ways to get students involved. Get faculty invested in students as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Host "student fairs" for incoming students.• Provide more opportunities for student involvement and better publicize their availability; promote benefits, lower Targum advertisement rate to enable student organizations to promote activities.
<p>Designate one person in each unit to handle inter-cultural issues.</p>
<p>Create "personal portal" to the university for all students. Provide integrated access to information and all vital stats for students (credit card model — summary on one statement).</p>

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Suggested Improvement

<p>Create opportunities for administration, faculty and staff to meet with students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build opportunities for collaboration with students.• Schedule periodic sessions for administration to meet with students – especially first-year students – in residence halls, for example.• Create opportunities to meet faculty/staff in dining facilities.• Town meetings and lunch with administration.• A day and a half each semester to engage with students regularly and across units in order to remove barriers and solve problems.• Create a “space” for faculty/staff to talk with students.
<p>Improve facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve aesthetics of offices and buildings.• Upgrade the quality of residence halls and other facilities.
<p>Create departmental advisory groups.</p>
<p>Increase staff sensitivity to student financial aid issues.</p>
<p>Create strict guidelines for offices that ask personal or sensitive questions (confidentiality).</p>
<p>Make RU a smoke-free campus.</p>
<p>Offer a dental plan to students.</p>
<p>Train students in self-advocacy.</p>

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Suggested Improvement

Develop a student-led effort to build a culture of service within departments.
Develop ownership by first-year students (perhaps through on-campus jobs).
Include career preparation as part of RU mission statement.
Devote additional resources to student services and other front-line staff.
Increase budget for student recruitment and use data on quality of RU programs to recruit good students.
Leaders need to promote customer service commitment at all levels in their organizations.

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Suggestions from student focus group and other sources

- Need to provide courteous service.
- Need to see students as “customers.”
- Need to treat students with respect.
- Need to create a culture that values civility and respect.
- Need to be sure there is consistent fair treatment to all students, undergraduate and graduate.
- Need to explain reasons for decisions/transparency of decision-making.
- Need to have decision makers accessible.
- Need to clarify exceptions.
- Need to convey a feeling that each student matters and that they are not expendable.
- Need to implement a university policy that addresses special-needs students.
- Need to prepare students to be better consumers.
- Need to assure equality among diverse groups.
- Need for equal treatment and visibility of all campuses and colleges.

Theme 2: Need for Enhanced Academic Support

(Perceived lack of emphasis on teaching, need for more effective evaluation/reward system for faculty performance, need for an improved advising process, better use of course-instructor evaluations, and need for relationship building between faculty and students)

Suggested Improvement

Improve course/instructor evaluation process.

- Emphasize the importance of course-instructor evaluation process to students. It's not taken seriously — students need to understand how evaluations are used.
- Institute online evaluations of course/instructor linked to registration process. Send evaluation on-line linked to prior semester schedule (Eliminate Scantron). Perhaps, reward students who comply by allowing them to register 1 day early.
- Provide easier access to course evaluation data online.
- Revamp evaluations for professors — have a mid-semester review.
- Institute formal evaluation of TA's ability to teach. Assessment beforehand (language problems, how to teach).
- Have third party administer course-instructor evaluation.
- Use course-instructor evaluation data in annual faculty evaluation process.
- Make sure there is follow up on evaluation results.

Increase attention to student life/service support.

- Have all Student Affairs personnel report to one person.
- Student Affairs meetings need to be more focused on improvement in processes and less on updates. Reframe role to focus on problems and how to solve them across units.
- Standardize first-year information delivery.
- Create a better orientation for students and parents — information about student and parent rights; introduce student and parent handbook.
- Standardize 1 credit first-year seminar.
- Enhance first-year student orientation to include more learning skills.
- Enhance orientation to include navigating Rutgers.
- Provide a mid-semester orientation for students who missed the orientation or who could benefit from this program; use peer facilitation.
- Create more special interest residence halls; new venture for engineering should be expanded, probably more attractive to first-year students. DC has language, culture and issue-related houses.
- Create new-student seminars on how to navigate the university, diversity, student life; combine administration and academic focus.
- Implement online registration for Recreational Services classes.
- Change allocation of student fees — Rutgers College would like a return of a proportion of student fees for engineering students affiliated with Rutgers College (requesting 90% return).

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Suggested Improvement

<p>Improve advising.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement student advising for first-year students.• Assign deans to do academic advising.• Centralize academic advising — i.e., single point of service.
<p>Raise teaching standards. Excellence in teaching/quality of teaching needs to be evaluated — 15% of tenure/promotion decision should be focused on excellence in teaching.</p>
<p>Create a reward system based on performance for academic members and units; provide bonuses/commission for great teaching evaluations.</p>
<p>Improve course availability — more evening courses, more options for non-majors, more offerings for foundation course, consistent special permission process.</p>
<p>Create a teaching-based tenure track. Make RU a "teaching-based research university."</p>
<p>Create a cross-functional team to address special needs of first-year students.</p>
<p>Improve staff-to-student ratio compared to sister schools.</p>

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Suggested Improvement

<p>Develop mentoring program for first-year students using upper-class student mentors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Answer questions about midterms, registration, exam reviews, discussions, information Q&A, especially for large lecture classes.• Have peer leadership programs and panel presentations.• Create courses on mentoring, plus improve first-year experience and formal structure of the university.• Advertise heavily.• Big brother/sister pairing with first-year students.• Mix years in residence halls.
<p>Put class schedule on web and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More information linked to each course listing (syllabus, description, prerequisites, information on what requirement each course satisfies at various colleges).• Required books.
<p>Improve ease of access to faculty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a system whereby professors "log-in" when they are in the office...students will know when they are in or if they can't make office hours.• Formalize office hours for faculty.
<p>Increase funding for TA's (discussion/recitation sections).</p>
<p>Increase personal contact between professors and students (e.g., smaller classes; faculty as mentors).</p>
<p>Return to individual college autonomy to create a better sense of community.</p>
<p>Get SAAC more involved in departmental meetings/curriculum development.</p>
<p>Encourage faculty to write more books and encourage use of their used editions rather than requiring the purchase of new editions.</p>

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Suggested Improvement

Introduce a new system for evaluation of faculty, deans and directors. Formal feedback mechanisms with individuals from different levels in hierarchy/meeting once per semester.
Offer more art courses for non-majors.
Offer more creative writing courses.
Initiate academic department reward system tied to excellence in service and teaching.
Establish some common way to do recruitment for honors programs, etc., around shared goals and commitment (with accountability).
Allow more time for graduate students to study without having to work.
Initiate computer-based chat sessions for lectures (especially large ones).
Utilize streaming audio/video for lectures.
Have course outline/syllabus/required readings emailed from professors or put on department websites.

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Suggested Improvement

Distribute a welcome note on course listserv.
Strengthen communication between FAS and professional schools.

Theme 2: Need for Enhanced Academic Support

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Suggestions from Student Focus Groups and Other Sources

- Need to emphasize the faculty's commitment to teaching.
- Need to better prepare TA's.
- Need to provide a sufficient number of courses for students.
- Need to encourage (perhaps require) student feedback on faculty teaching; promote the use of feedback for improvement, development, and reward of faculty teaching improvement and excellence.

Theme 3: Absence of Effective Feedback Mechanisms on Services

(Lack of systematic collection of information on student needs/satisfaction, lack of vehicles for students to voice concerns or comments on issues affecting them, need for benchmarking)

Suggested Improvement

<p>Create formal evaluation mechanisms for service departments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement system of focus/advisory groups for service units.• Survey students and provide results to services units and students (university-wide surveys and point-of-service surveys).• Enhance and use unit websites/listserves for feedback to administrators/policy makers.• Install suggestion boxes at service offices and departments.• Create more feedback options for students.• Disseminate results to departments.• Use to encourage engagement.• Publicize results within university.• Make laptops available in dining halls and student centers so students can provide feedback on different topics.• Gather and publicize data for service units over-time, and for comparisons among service units.• Use evaluation data in assessments of service-unit administrators (P4P).• Conduct surveys and focus groups to identify top quality- of-life issues, and devote resources to them.
<p>Use Nordstrom model — commissions for great evaluations, accountability for problems.</p>
<p>All departments should have a point person or some other way for students to be able to voice their concerns on problems.</p>
<p>Benchmark with other schools to see what they are doing well...look at other schools that are rated highly by students.</p>
<p>Develop system (linked to RU website) for seeking student opinions on important issues (e.g., restructuring).</p>
<p>Evaluate administrators and staff who deal with students — allow for honest improvement suggestions without fear of retribution.</p>

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Suggested Improvement

Analyze <u>college-based</u> services and use to improve service delivery.
Conduct external reviews of service units.

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Suggestions from Student Focus Groups and Other Sources

- Establish a Baldrige Award program — *Presidential Service Awards*— to reward best service unit, engender pride, promote competition for excellence.
- Develop effective mechanisms for providing feedback.
- Follow-up on feedback.
- Be responsive to feedback.
- Create point-of-service feedback opportunities. Mini surveys (web and in- person feedback cards) combined with name tags and business cards for front-line staff. Business cards and name tags foster a personalized approach and easy follow-up, plus identities encourage accountability and pride of work, and allow for feedback.

Theme 4: Need for Enhanced Communication/Information

(Need for student/service provider information sharing, need for student input into communication planning, need for consistency of information, need for comprehensive contact information)

Suggested Improvement

Improve RU and departmental websites.

- Develop one website to serve as an administrative gateway.
- Improve the search engine.
- Create a website listing staff with responsibility for specific issues.
- Create a student-affairs page linked to the RU home page.
- Add keyword searching as an option on the RU page.
- Design a web-based form that allows students to request assistance, complete with response to student (time it will take to get back to student; auto reply indicating receipt; follow-up contact information, one that asks for preferred mode of communication and indicates if form has been forwarded to another department; etc.)
- Develop a student services web map.
- Include flow charts that outline each step in a particular process (how to register, how to apply for financial aid, where to go about graduation questions, etc.)
- Enhance department websites to contain information about student and social activities and organizations related to department...post meeting times and days.
- Divide RU website: academics, co-curricular, services, Greeks, religious, cultural.
- Develop FAQs for important things students should know and are required to do, and put these on the RU website.
- Better organize information about Rutgers; it's hard to know what resources are available to students.
- Use the website to recruit and publicize faculty.
- Add common headings that would be part of each department website as a way to provide basic information on core department activities.

Utilize additional channels for communication.

- Expand available information for students — FAQ, pamphlets, flow charts, etc.
- Create multiple methods for communicating consistent, unified information to students.
- Use the back of seats on campus buses as a channel for getting out important information.
- Make student handbook more helpful by providing details of where to go for what.
- Make faculty/staff directory available to students and expand it.
- List buildings on campus maps.

Devote more attention to RU branding; disseminate consistent messages about the institution, clear marketing — a logo and/or statement that represents the benefits or programs for students.

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(Need for student/service provider information sharing, need for student input into communication planning, need for consistency of information, need for comprehensive contact information)

Suggested Improvement

<p>Establish a central clearinghouse for collecting and disseminating academic/nonacademic service information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a system for finding who does what within the university (expert locator or key word).• Develop an easy way to get contact information, both offices and individuals.
<p>Educate students about what the university is and how it works — its mission, offerings, what various departments do, how various processes work (e.g., admissions, registration, etc.).</p>
<p>Initiate a broad public relations campaign targeted at current and prospective students.</p>
<p>Disseminate information/communicate to students how decisions are made (e.g., security/financial aid). Could be handed out at "Student Fairs," student life offices. Perhaps SAAC can be involved in disseminating.</p>
<p>Integrate database/information from departments (i.e., sharing between housing and dining, financial aid, registrar, and parking).</p>
<p>Create more people-to-people communication and more resources to support it.</p>
<p>Establish better communication between resident life and housing departments.</p>
<p>Address ways to deliver bad news with a positive attitude. Choose most appropriate media — (email, face to face, etc.).</p>
<p>Publicize research/news at Rutgers to the community — get students involved in process.</p>

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Suggestions from Student Focus Groups and Other Sources

- Develop a Student Charter, similar to patient's bill of rights that outlines what students can expect from RU, and their responsibilities in making the partnership work. Distribute charter to all new students with orientation materials and once a year to all continuing students via an email note with web link.
- Publicize and widely disseminate referral information in the form of pocket size and small poster publications (and a website) that give thumbnail sketches of which office to go to for what purpose, parking permits, pay a bill, get a transcript, change my dorm room, make sure I have the credits to graduate. Copies could be distributed to all staff offices, students and faculty – so that anyone at the university can be helpful in directing students to the appropriate place.
- Need to better inform students about available help lines and other sources of assistance.

Theme 5: Need for Improved Process & Service Approaches

(Need for collaboration across units, need to simplify/improve/change how things are done, need for enhanced/increased service training, lack of rewards/recognition for excellent service, overuse of voice mail and bulletin boards, need for standardization – office hours, lack of adequate staffing)

Suggested Improvement

<p>Standardize hours for service units throughout the campus and aggressively disseminate the information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a special schedule of services for key periods.• Increase flexibility of services: extended hours in peak time; open during lunch; one late night per week, evening hours for evening students.• Add staff/temps in offices open past 4:30 pm.• Establish late night dining hours.
<p>Create convenient, one-stop shopping for student services; locate financial aid, registrar, cashier, parking, dining, housing, academic advising under one roof.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration between offices.• Combined web Q&A.• Less travel for students.
<p>Encourage staff knowledge of and pride in the institution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orientation for faculty/staff.• Train front-line and supervisors on the organization of the university in order to better assist students and become ambassadors for student services.
<p>Provide all service staff with name tags and business cards, and assure that they are worn/used.</p>
<p>Expand service evaluation and recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make service a component of P4P process.• Recognize high quality service operations.• Require “customer” service accountability.• Make service a part of every employee’s annual evaluation.• Renegotiate contracts with employee groups to include formal evaluation process for front-line people based on performance.

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Suggested Improvement

<p>Expand professional development training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty and staff training – service, civility, cultural issues, sensitivity/diversity, and cross-cultural communication skills (allow offices to close for training as long as there is advanced notice).
<p>Create additional locations for critical offices; especially during opening weeks of class — e.g., cashiers to help out with parking on Busch.</p> <p>Streamline or consolidate services in student centers for 1st two weeks each semester. Or, rotate the "group" each day; Monday at Cook, Tuesday at DC, etc. For computer-based services, staff could travel.</p>
<p>Create a student group (liaisons) to work with units/departments on improving processes.</p>
<p>Develop incentives for staff employees to provide quality service, e.g., meal plans.</p>
<p>Streamline processes — less complex, less cumbersome way of doing things. Provide conceptual flow charts.</p>
<p>Create Amazon.com-type online ordering system for textbooks; all books arrive at central pick-up points so students don't have to go to multiple places to pick up books.</p>
<p>Do not allow student/staff to request private information about one student from other students, e.g., Health Services.</p>
<p>Automate reminders to students regarding tickets and problems.</p>
<p>Provide incentives to faculty and staff for not bringing their cars to campus to allow for more student parking.</p>

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Suggested Improvement

Expand meal plans to include student center vendors.
Establish a way students can donate unused meals to charity: fees are for a set number of meals, and students should be able to give away unused meals.
Get refunds earlier (Financial Aid and Cashier; refunds now held to mid-September or mid-January).
Provide TA stipend credit earlier in the semester.
Assure equity among all campuses when it comes to safety and security.
Improve staffing in student service areas to quicken turnaround/information request times.
Eliminate automated voicemail. Use people.
Allow for refunds on meal plans or even credit in the form of university merchandise — books and supplies at university stores.
Put mailboxes on campuses where students live.

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Suggestions from Student Focus Groups and Other Sources

- Move toward a single point of service for student services with cross-trained, user-friendly staff to help students. Interim strategies might include a virtual single point of contact via the Web, and/or one of several centers with most or all student services problems via electronic connection.
- Need to improve the effectiveness of referral processes – need to improve staff knowledge base, attitudes, information support tools.
- Provide referral training for front-line staff in high volume service areas so that they are more knowledgeable not only in their own areas, but also are able to make more accurate referrals.
- Extended and/or standardized office hours for service (and some academic) departments, including noon, and perhaps extended beyond 4:30 pm.
- Need to review the process for how students reserve and schedule events at campus centers and other locations.
- Need to evaluate the process of spring transfers.
- Need to re-evaluate processes to eliminate redundancy in paperwork.
- Need to evaluate and standardize hours of operation.