Success Matters at Southern Miss – Eagles Engaged

Rationale for the Plan
Student success is at the core of the mission of any university, and indeed it is threaded through the mission and values of the University of Southern Mississippi, through the 2007-09 strategic planning process, within President Bennett’s vision for USM, and in the focus areas of current university-wide strategic planning.

The Plan
The Success Matters at Southern Miss – Eagles Engaged (SMSM-EE) project entails a multi-pronged approach to improved student success:

- **Supplemental Instruction.** Supplemental instruction (SI), a proven academic support concept utilized by many universities, is “an academic assistance program that utilizes peer-assisted study sessions.”
- **Faculty Development.** Providing faculty with expanded skills and resources to implement active, engaged learning environments is an important pillar of the SMSM-EE plan.
- **Curricular Innovation.** Departments, especially those delivering GEC 01-05 courses, will be invited to propose innovative curricular development projects aimed at improving student success and engagement.
- **Enhanced Learning Environments.** The project includes the physical and technological redesign of a number of learning spaces to complement new approaches to teaching, promote student collaboration, and encourage active learning.

The SMSM-EE plan will provide students with enhanced academic support services and learning environments, particularly in the General Education Curriculum courses that have historically been barriers to student success. The combined elements of the plan are designed to improve success rates in those courses, with the expected effect of increasing student persistence rates through to graduation – helping to create the “pathways to degree completion” that are a key element of President Bennett’s vision for USM. Faculty development aspects of the plan target the development of high impact pedagogical approaches to encouraging student learning, while the classroom redesign dimension aims to provide learning environments that complement effective teaching practices and encourage active, engaged student learning.

First-year and transfer students needing to complete GEC requirements would certainly constitute the most readily identifiable groups impacted by the project, but all students will potentially benefit from the expanded teaching repertoire of faculty, the promotion of engaged learning, the improved success of classmates, and the opportunities presented by redesigned classroom space.

Baseline data for the project already exist in persistence and graduation rates and in student satisfaction data. SMSM-EE success will be tracked at multiple levels, factoring in the plan elements of availability and participation in SI opportunities, participation of instructors in the faculty development opportunities, the impact of curricular innovation, and course enrollments in redesigned learning space.

Resources to implement the plan
- Supplemental Instruction Support
- Faculty Development Seminars
- Incentives for Curricular Innovation
- Enhanced Learning Environments

A notable advantage of a QEP focused on student success is that the project will generate its own resources. Improved student success in general, and certainly in gatekeeper courses that can impede student progress, means that more students will continue at the University, which means that more student credit hours are being generated, more tuition is being paid, and more state funding is potentially available, thus providing greater fiscal resources to the University for its mission to educate and promote student success.