UNIVERSITY OF South Carolina

The Graduate School

Associate/Assistant Graduate Deans Council Meeting

September 24, 2024

The AAGDC Meeting was held on Tuesday, September 2024, at 2:00 pm in CLS 110 in the College of Pharmacy.

Present: Drs. Angela Baum, Robin Dawson, Satish Jayachandran, Daniel Jenkins, Murray Mitchell, Dale Moore, Doug Pittman, Ben Roth, Susan Steck, Angelina Sylvain, Kim Thompson, Paul Toriello, Jack Turner, Jeff Twiss, Ann Vail

Graduate Admissions Systems Optimization Task Force Update – Vice Dean Sylvain

The Associate/Assistant Graduate Deans Council met to discuss key updates on the Graduate School's involvement in the Student Assistance Council and progress from the Systems Optimization Task Force. Angelina Sylvain provided an in-depth update on the task force's efforts, focusing on system mapping, vendor engagement, and the challenges with the current admissions and enrollment systems. The meeting included discussions on integration and improving functionality across the student life cycle.

Systems Optimization Task Force Update:

Angelina Sylvain reported that the task force is making significant strides by engaging with vendors, system mapping, and addressing integration challenges. The goal is to improve data access, flexibility, and communication. Emphasis was placed on centralized data tracking, confidentiality, and ease of use as essential features in new system considerations. The group was then led through a series of exercises to collect feedback for the Task Force.

Exercise Summaries

Exercise 1: Admissions and Enrollment Process Feedback In this exercise, participants were paired to discuss what is working well in their admissions and enrollment processes. Key takeaways include:

- **Admissions Process**:
    - **Automated Communication**: Several participants highlighted the automated email reminders for applicants, ensuring they submit missing documents and keep track of deadlines.
    - **Transparent Tracking**: Participants highlighted the ease of tracking students' progress through different application stages using the current system.
    - **Pre-Screening Systems**: One college noted that pre-screening outside of the application system streamlined the process before applicants officially applied.

- **Enrollment Process**:
    - **Recruiters and Staff**: Several programs highlighted the importance of having dedicated recruiters and support staff, who ensure a strong admissions pipeline. This human resource investment was recognized as a key strength.
    - **Integration with National Systems**: The connection with national systems for pre-screening applicants was noted as a success in some programs, enhancing enrollment efficiency.

Exercise 2: Identifying Pain Points in Enrollment Progression In this individual exercise, participants were asked to write down challenges related to tracking and supporting student progression from initial enrollment through graduation. Here are the highlights from group discussions:

- **Manual Processes**: Many programs continue to rely on paper forms, which leads to inefficiency and a risk of documents being lost or delayed in email communication.
- **Staffing Issues**: Inadequate staffing and high turnover rates complicate the ability to track student progress, especially as staff experience a learning curve.
- **Lack of Major Maps**: Some participants expressed the need for structured guidelines, or "major maps," similar to those provided to undergraduate students. These would outline typical progression milestones for graduate students, helping to standardize expectations.
- **Culture of Exceptions**: The frequent need for exceptions to standard procedures slows down the progression process, leading to delays and frustrations.

Exercise 3: Prioritizing Pain Points In this final exercise, participants were asked to prioritize the most critical issues in the admissions and enrollment systems. The two main pain points identified were:

- **Data Integration and Access**: There was a strong consensus that the primary challenge is the manual transfer of data across systems. The need for a centralized, integrated system that allows for real-time data access was repeatedly emphasized.
- **System User Friendliness**: The current system's complexity and lack of intuitive design were seen as significant barriers. Faculty and staff reported difficulty navigating the system, leading to inefficiencies.

Key Insights and Recommendations

1. **Focus on Centralized Systems**: The group's feedback strongly points to the need for a centralized system that integrates different stages of the student lifecycle, from prospect to graduation. Addressing the manual data transfer processes should be a priority to reduce redundancy and errors.
2. **System Flexibility and Customization**: Participants want systems that are customizable to meet the unique needs of their programs while still integrating essential functions such as student progression tracking.
3. **Support for Non-Course Requirements**: There was a call for systems to capture non-course progression data, such as qualifying exams and graduate assistantships, that are crucial but often overlooked.
4. **Improve User Experience**: The overall usability of the system needs to be addressed, making it more intuitive for both administrators and faculty who handle admissions and student progression.

Next Meeting: October 29, 2024, 2:00 – 4:00 pm, College of Pharmacy, CLS 110

Minutes by Cherrie Markey