

## SUMMARY OF REPORT

### Introduction

The University Studies Program (UNST) at North Carolina A&T State University is a uniquely designed effort to deliver general education to students.

Scholars for Educational Excellence and Diversity, Inc. (Scholars) was engaged to conduct a review of UNST and report their assessment and recommendations to the administration of North Carolina A&T State University. The reviewers analyzed available documents and conducted an on-site visit September 27-29, 2009.

### The Findings

#### UNST Core Curriculum

#### Foundation Courses

The five foundation courses—experienced in the first year—are coherent and well-crafted; the curriculum is reasonably consistent with exemplary general education programs in other institutions.

#### Theme Clusters

Beyond the foundation courses students are required to enroll in a cluster of courses organized around a common theme. In general the theme clusters are severely lacking in fulfilling the goals of general education at North Carolina A&T State. There is no consistent rationale or academic/intellectual vision for each of the clusters.

#### Co-Curricular Program Components

Students must complete fifty hours of service learning as part of their graduation requirements. This is the only co-curricular component of the University Studies program. Student volunteer activities seem disconnected from academic learning.

#### Faculty Qualifications and Credentialing—UNST

In general we found the UNST faculty to be an impressive group. They are talented, energetic and clearly dedicated to the program and particularly to their students. Several of the faculty have adjunct or limited appointments and are therefore ineligible for tenure. Even those with appropriate credentials do not have appointments in their disciplines within the colleges of departments.

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**Administrative Structure and Managerial Operation**

The University Studies Program is seriously hobbled by the combination of a convoluted administrative structure and a conflict-ridden managerial operation. The administrative structure is void of coherence, responsibility and direction.

The management and leadership of University Studies are vested in a Dean who has organized and developed the academic program and recruited many of its faculty and staff. He is committed to evidence-based decision making.

In interactions with peers and subordinates the Dean's commitment to excellence sometimes results in challenging management. This has been experienced by faculty, staff and administrators with questions about University Studies.

**Institutional Satisfaction**

University Studies is a major part of the educational experience for undergraduates at NC A&T. This is recognized by all constituents. While we heard many criticisms and complaints the program also received many accolades. The conclusion is mixed.

Most of the students ultimately gave a positive assessment even after sharp criticisms.

The faculty were critical of parts of the program, but in general supported the goals, aims and processes involved in providing a general education. Some faculty have specific criticisms of the program—particularly in its mathematics and English offerings—but these are concerns that can be managed and corrected.

University Studies received a remarkably high level of criticism relevant to managerial operation. There was, also, support and praise from some UNST faculty.

**In conclusion, we find:**

- University Studies is a "segmented" program. Students acquire general education goals in the foundation courses but not in the overall program.
- The evaluation/assessment efforts in the foundation courses are excellent and substantiate the value of the courses.
- The theme clusters, service learning and capstone components as currently configured make limited contributions to the general education goals of University Studies.
- The University Studies faculty are well-credentialed and competent to fulfill their academic responsibilities.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- The organizational placement of University Studies within the administrative structure of the university hampers the effective management of the program.
- The Dean of University Studies has provided superb direction in developing the program, selecting faculty, and instituting comprehensive course assessment.
- The management operation of University Studies received a high level of criticism.

**Recommendations**

1. The University should emphasize student learning, persistence and graduation as the essential criteria in further review and evaluation of general education efforts.
2. The University administration should review its general organizational structure in relation to the placement of University Studies.
3. The University Studies faculty should receive unequivocal administrative support for security of employment, professional development, and a learning-centered teaching environment—including reasonable class size.
4. UNST and Student Affairs should ensure that students learn about UNST during the admissions process as well as orientation. The curriculum should not come as a surprise to students.
5. The rationale/relevance of UNST, or any general education curriculum should be made clear to students using language they understand.
6. The basic structure of the University Studies Foundation Courses should be maintained, but strengthened through careful integration of additional emphasis on mathematics, English and writing.
7. The emphasis on assessment and evaluation on student learning in general education courses should be sustained and improved.
8. UNST should develop faculty forums to discuss the learning objectives, assessment of outcomes, and continued development of effective pedagogy.
9. UNST 100 should be integrated into the other foundation courses. Its specific learning objectives can be effectively incorporated into existing courses.

**University Studies Program  
North Carolina A&T State University  
Report, Evaluation and Recommendations**

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10. Theme clusters—as components of general education—should be evaluated and either strengthened or eliminated. As presently organized they have limited value to general education and liberal learning.
11. The service learning requirement should be effectively integrated into UNST foundation courses as well as into Student Affairs.
12. The need for supplemental instruction should be reviewed. It may reflect the preparation and quality of entering students, and/or the effectiveness of the pedagogy in UNST courses. There can be a more effective response to the need.
13. Capstone courses should be developed and/or improved by thoughtful linkages to University Studies and the core learning objectives.
14. The University administration should provide visible leadership in resolving the conflicts between University Studies, the Faculty Senate, and the Academic Units. University Studies should be sustained but there needs to be much more communication, cooperation and mutual support.
15. The University administration should develop a comprehensive plan to integrate University Studies, Student Affairs and Academic units (Colleges/Departments) into a program based on the High Impact Practices of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, including the current efforts toward Service Learning and Supplemental Instruction. These high impact practices include such strategies as:
  - Learning Communities
  - Collaborative Learning
  - Peer Counseling/Advising
  - Undergraduate Student Research

**ADDENDUM**

**RECOMMENDATION #9  
UNIVERSITY STUDIES PROGRAM REPORT, EVALUATION AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**UNST 100 should be integrated into the other foundation courses. It should be an integral part of the curriculum rather than an "add-on". Its specific learning objectives can also be effectively incorporated into existing courses.**