SWOT ANALYSIS
Intellectual Capital of Students is Embedded in the Region

Strengths
• Diverse supply of high energy, intelligent, hard working, civically curious, students from many different disciplines. Increasing interests on the part of students for active learning which involves “out-of-classroom” activities that are relevant to future careers (e.g. Engineering co-op, Nursing practicum and clinical experiences, internships, service learning).
• Commitment of a cadre of experienced and competent faculty and staff who support engagement in service learning, experiential learning, and community service in the region.
• Established and growing positive history with industry/community partners who have benefited from UMD students’ knowledge, enthusiasm and fresh ideas (e.g. ATMC, Sustainability initiatives, Washington Center for Internships, etc.).
• A growing interdisciplinary base of successful prototypes on and off campus.
• University commitment to embed facilities and learning opportunities within reach of community needs (e.g. ATMC, Star Store, and FR campus).
• Acknowledgement that service and experiential activities are crucial to our mission as a public University. The 2000 - 2010 Strategic Plan included the following vision statement: “Develop Theory-Practice model with new focus on experiential learning as a critical component of UMD education and integrate across campus curriculum.”

Weaknesses
• Disconnect on campus between service and learning which may be due to a lack of resources and support staff devoted to service learning initiatives. For example, there is no centralized coordination/delivery mechanism for campus-wide, theory-practice initiatives at UMD.
• The lack of a comprehensive marketing, recruitment, and retention plan (to companies) for internship and co-op programs results in insufficient opportunities for students in many disciplines. Bryant has roughly 300 employers requesting interns. We need to develop relationships with companies/agencies requesting our services.
• Tenure and promotion process does not adequately reward efforts at developing community partnerships, service, or service learning. These activities are time intensive. The lack of faculty involvement (in mentoring and developing class embedded projects) decreases student involvement.
• Financial burden requires many students to work an ever increasing number of hours limiting their ability to take part in volunteer activities, community service projects, co-ops, and non-paying internships.
• Student retention rates are low (six year Freshmen to Graduation rate 51%) and some indices dropping (Freshmen retention rate was 79% in 2000 and 76% in 2005).
• Growth in student body to fund operational cost without concurrent investment in infrastructure, support services, faculty/staff development, and new programs.

• Lack of advising standards and practices across departments and colleges, leading to problems with student retention, academic success, and completion of requirements toward graduation, at the least. Advising gaps impede students' knowledge of and ability to participate in community-based learning opportunities and service.

• Lack of database to track relationships with community agencies, businesses, and other placements where our students have interned and/or secured employment related to their field(s) of study, for faculty and students who come after to use as a resource.

Opportunities

• National focus on experiential learning, service learning, and community service with a strong regional presence (e.g. National Campus Compact in Providence; Mass Campus Compact very strong). Ranking bodies and key publications (ex. US New and World Report, Princeton Review, etc) now take into consideration the extent to which Universities inculcate and encourage an ethic of service.

• Increasing number of grant and research opportunities in the area of service learning, civic engagement, and community service because research shows the positive effects these activities have on student development. Perhaps even some state funds will be designated for that purpose (Governor Patrick’s recent announcement).

• Most UMD graduates remain in the South Coast Region presenting an opportunity to expand experiential learning opportunities through our alumni network.

• New employers moving into the area (ex. Meditech) and expansion of area business and industrial parks. Growing trend shows employers recruit and hire students with relevant experience and an ability to differentiate themselves based on civic engagement upon graduation.

• Region has serious needs for sharing our intellectual capital for health, education, social services, environment, technology development, small business development, the arts, workforce development, etc. As the only state University in the South Coast Region, there are countless opportunities to engage students in learning-rich activities.

• This goal aids in meeting other goals and objectives of Strategic Plan, i.e. (1) - Recognition of the University for Programmatic Excellence, (2 & 3) - Excellence of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs, and (4) – Integrating Innovative Teaching/Learning Strategies and Preparing Students for the 21st Century.
Threats

- Competition from other colleges and universities (ex. Bridgewater, Salve). Roger Williams and Boston University are marketing internships and co-ops within the region - sometimes advertising in the Torch.
- Sharp growth in demand for “for profit” (Ex. University of Phoenix) and on-line only degrees. Some very talented students opting toward non-traditional educational experiences.
- Agencies often lack an understanding of the time and effort they must spend with an intern in order to help them become productive. Most organizations lack a good “point person” or preceptor for student involvement.
- Continued decline in state appropriations and investment in public higher education making it almost impossible to fund new initiatives (ex. Service learning) or expand existing operations (ex. Career Services). Full time staff needed to develop partnerships, expand internship opportunities, and grow programs.
- Local industry and politicians in “survival mode” – not leaving any time or money to work on future developments and/or University-Community partnerships.
- Actual and proposed cuts in student financial aid grants may increase student loan burdens, limiting their time and financial flexibility to engage in service learning, and limiting their ability to take (lower-paying, relative to industry) human service jobs following graduation.
- Academic schedule is often not in phase with community needs. Students assigned to projects for a semester but the need is longer.