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**Supporting Students at UMass Dartmouth**

***Data from Spring 2013 Freshmen and Senior Focus Groups***

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) conducted student focus group sessions over several weeks in March of 2013. The focus groups were held in order to gather in-depth, qualitative data about overall student satisfaction and student satisfaction with the supportiveness of the campus environment at UMass Dartmouth (UMD). A review of findings from the spring 2002, spring 2005, spring 2008, and spring 2011 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at UMD indicated that UMD freshmen and seniors rate the supportiveness of the campus environment at UMD significantly lower than their peers at similar institutions. A series of six focus groups were held, including three groups with a total of 13 freshmen and three groups with a total of 18 seniors, to discuss students’ experiences at UMD.

**Key Findings**

Some freshmen and seniors both reported that:

* They selected to attend UMD due to favorable price, location, and reputation. In addition to their involvements on campus, students also pointed to these reasons as ones that would influence them to return to UMD if they had the option to do so again.
* They had issues with academic advising experiences. These included difficulties getting a hold of advisors or not getting the support they needed.
* They had issues with administrative offices. This included offices not giving or knowing the right information and sending students to the wrong locations.
* They had good support from professors, teaching assistants, and tutors. Professors were particularly depicted as approachable and supportive.
* They would suggest using focus groups or some other form of face-to-face means to continue to gather student input.

Some freshmen reported that:

* They were dissatisfied with their educational experience due to academic issues, such as disengaged professors in lower-level classes and cheating and distractions from electronic devices in the classroom. Others indicated that the transition from high school to college had been stressful.

Some seniors reported that:

* They were dissatisfied with the quality of academic facilities. They noted that fees did not seem to translate to repairs or upgrades that were needed in some facilities.