

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northern Michigan University: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Laptop Goal: Enhancing Student Recruitment

Project Details

Title	Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Laptop Goal: Enhancing Student Recruitment	Status	IN UPDATE
Category	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	Updated	
Timeline		Reviewed	
Planned Project Kickoff	10-15-2009	Created	01-06-2010
Target Completion	05-31-2010	Last Modified	09-13-2010

1: Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project:

A: The charge of this Action Project was to provide a means to assess the goal of the Teaching, Learning and Communication (TLC) Initiative – to enhance student recruitment – has been met. The Action Project team discussed possible strategies to obtain information regarding the effectiveness of the laptop in student recruitment. Rather than automatically create new sources of data, the committee reviewed available sources that might provide time span information. As a result, the use of the “New Student Orientation” survey was identified as one of the most valuable tools to assess the question. In addition, the use of a survey already distributed to parents of new freshman applicants who chose not to attend the University was identified as another source of data. Finally, the group decided that the university’s Admissions counselors, key people presenting the laptop program to prospective students, would be a good resource of information.

I. NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION SURVEY ANALYSIS

While current student opinion is important, the New Student Orientation Program audience links directly to this Action Project on recruitment effectiveness. The New Student Orientation Program provides comprehensive programs and services that facilitate the transition of new students to Northern Michigan University prior to the start of classes. Orientation sessions are two-three day events occurring late May to mid-July for Fall semester entering students, and early January for Winter semester entering students. All new freshman, transfer, guest, full time and part time students planning to enroll in courses are required to attend. Other students, such as re-entry or post- baccalaureate, may attend.

All students attending orientation sessions are surveyed in an attempt to collect data on a variety of topics to help the university in its efforts to recruit and retain students. In 2007, the laptop program was added to the survey topics. The survey has a 100 % response rate since it is delivered as part of the orientation process. Between 2007 and 2010 a total of 6,014 new students responded to the question, “Why did you choose to attend NMU? (Please check no more than three responses). The list of options was a broad category of 14 choices: Academic programs; Academic reputation; Athletics; Close to home; Cost/Value; Environment; Far from home; Financial aid; In-state university; Involvement, Know people; Laptop program; Medium size; and Personal attention. Consistently, new students ranked “Cost/Value” first (28.3% average) and “Academic reputation” second (15.0% average) as reasons for choosing NMU. “Close to home” (12.0% average) and “Financial aid” (10.0% average) oscillate for third and fourth rankings. “Far from home” (7.0% average) and “Laptop program” (6.6%) oscillate for fifth and sixth rankings out of 14.

In analyzing these comparative results, the AP team discussed the ranking of the laptop program’s contribution to students’ reasons to choose NMU. While 6.6% seems like a relatively low percent, its ranking was not; only reasons associated with academics, cost and proximity to home rank higher. These are highly valued assets in our list of reasons to attend the university and, indeed, the committee believed that a higher ranking of “Laptop Program” would not be desirable and that is well placed.

In analyzing time span results for the Laptop program as a reason to come to NMU, the AP team noted a decrease in percent from 8.5% in 2007 to 4.6% in 2010. Since the relative rankings did not change, the difference is explained by offsetting increases in Cost/Value and proximity to home factors. In more challenging economic times, those two factors likely take on more importance. Also, it is likely that the "newness" and "uniqueness" factors of a laptop program are diminishing since the program's inception in 2001. It was understood when the program was launched that a window of opportunity did exist; NMU's entry at the front of the laptop movement took advantage of that window. Since the relative importance of the Laptop Program continues to be stable, the AP team believes this data supports successful completion of the goal, i.e. has enhanced recruitment. Detailed results of the survey, as they relate to the question of reasons to come to NMU, are available on the NMU AQIP website at <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/LaptopRecruitment/LaptopRecruitmentIntro.shtml>

II. SURVEY OF PARENTS OF NON-ATTENDING STUDENTS

Another pre-existing resource was found in a survey, conducted over a five year period, of parents of students who chose not to attend NMU. In using this historical data, the AP team hoped to determine whether lack of awareness or perceived value played a role in non-attendance. In 2002 and 2003, several years into the laptop program, parents were asked, "Were you aware of NMU's Laptop Program?" Of 458 respondents, 85% indicated they were aware of the program. In 2005 and 2006, the question was revised to asking parents to identify strengths of the university from a list of options. In 2005, of 285 respondents, 41 individuals (14.4%) listed it as a strength of the university. In 2006, of 215 respondents, 18 (8.4%) listed it as a strength of the university. In 2005 and 2006, the laptop program ranked 5th and 9th respectively as a strength of the university from the list of options. The AP team realized it would not be feasible to replicate such a survey in 2009-2010, due primarily to timing. The point of "non-attendance" decisions occurs in late summer. The Action Project did begin until late fall and by the point the team realized the possible value of a survey of parents of 2009 non-attenders, it was too far removed from that late summer timeframe to be a realistic data collection, i.e. the delay of inquiry might be negatively perceived by parents and do more harm than good. The 2010 cycle was too late to be completed and data analyzed within the context of the Action Project.

III. SOLICITATION OF INSIGHT FROM ADMISSIONS PERSONNEL

NMU Admissions counselors were surveyed to gain an insight as to their perception of the effectiveness of the program. Fourteen professional staff responded to the survey, and all indicated that it was a value-added component to our student recruitment message. The comments of the 14 respondents were studied for themes and word frequencies. Certain comments were of particular notice. Ten staff used the word "positive" in referring to the program and how it is responded to by potential students. Eight counselors said students identified with the overall value of the program. Seven staff said it is one of many "perks" used to communicate with prospective students. Eight counselors indicated that they did not feel it was the deciding factor in a new student's decision to attend the university. It was the general consensus that after 10 years, the laptop program has come to be an expectation of students and taking it away would be very detrimental to recruitment efforts.

2: Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project:

A: An Action Project team representing the primary units charged with student recruitment consisted of: Associate Provost, Student Services and Enrollment (Action Project Director); Admissions Counselor; Director of Communications and Marketing; Marketing Director; and AQIP Liaison. All members of the Admissions Office were included in a qualitative data collection process. Additional staff in Institutional Research, New Student Orientation, AdIT (Administrative Information Technology), and Communications and Marketing were involved in distributing, collecting, analyzing, and producing information related to the project.

3: Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project:

A: While a logical conclusion would determine that the laptop program is an effective tool in our student recruitment strategies, looking at the effectiveness of the initiative in comparison to cost were not analyzed. An assessment of

the program costs and its comparison to the impact of student recruitment might be considered.

It is recommended that the university further review marketing efforts related to the laptop program to analyze if there is any correlation between students considering the program as part of their reasons for attending NMU. A focus group of Admissions counselors would be appropriate to convene; the group could offer suggestions for marketing material changes and could be a test bed for planned changes. These recommendations coincide with a regularly schedule publications review planned for this year, and therefore are quite likely to be accepted.

4: Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project:

A: A common tactic when desiring stakeholder opinion is to create a survey. However, rather than automatically create new sources of data, the committee reviewed available sources that might provide time span information. This was found to be an effective use of resources and committee time, and reduced intrusion on stakeholders.

5: What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project? This is an opportunity to get constructive, actionable feedback and advice from our review process. Use this question to specify where your blocks, gaps, sticking points, or problems are. If you have already fashioned strategies to deal with any challenge you face, share both the challenge and your strategy for meeting it. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help beyond the review process, explain your need(s) and tell us whom to contact and when.:

A: At this time, we do not see any major challenges regarding the project. The University always felt confident that the laptop program was an effective program to enhance our student recruitment efforts. Reviewed data confirms that while academic reputation, costs, and proximity to home are important factors in determining attendance at NMU, the laptop program is important. Continued review of the university's marketing efforts in regards to both the laptop program and its complete technology package to students will remain a top priority.