Summary of Student Affairs Interviews for the ISP Review Task Force (10/26/11)

Student Life, Disabilities Services, Residential Life, Student Affairs Administration

Mission:
There was strong support for the mission. This is a synthesis of what they perceived the mission to be: Providing students with a well-rounded, liberal arts education, which develops analytical and critical thinking skills that can be applied in a broad range of areas. Their perception was that this was relevant to the mission of Student Affairs too.

Governance and Structure:
Most Student Affairs staff, with the exception of those at the highest level, have little to no understanding of how the Program functions. Their insights come primarily from students they have interacted with. These accounts range from the idea that the ISP is just another form of general education requirements or a checklist that needs to be completed to a set of requirements that are confusing and difficult to complete given course schedules and other program requirements. The highest level staff members see the Program as one that has evolved over time, becoming clearer to the campus community, but as yet has not reached its’ full potential.

Communication:
The majority of the staff that were interviewed have a general and limited understanding of the mission of the ISP, with the exception of the few staff members that have had specific interactions with the Program. One of the biggest obstacles to Student Affair people becoming more involved with and supporting ISP is a basic, straightforward explanation of the Program and more formal way in which they can become involved.

The level and quality of the communication regarding the ISP was an area all the staff felt could be improved. With the exception of two staff members that had served on the Program’s Board, none of them had any knowledge of the Handbook. Because the staff see little formal connection to the Program, they had never accessed information regarding it except to answer specific issues or questions that students had raised.

The staff made a number of recommendations regarding how communication with Student Affairs could be improved. These include the development of a short pamphlet, brochure, or reference sheet that provided basic information in casual, “user-friendly” language so that they could better assist students.

A concern was raised that class scheduling times leave a lot of students frantic and that a significant number of students feel that their advisor is not helpful or too busy.

The other recommendation was an on-line resource clearinghouse where staff could learn what courses were being taught and what topics or issues were being addressed. Such a clearinghouse could be used by the staff and faculty, allowing all members of KSC to catalogue their skills and interests so that faculty teaching in the ISP could potentially access them as resources for lessons or activities.

Implementation:
There were many comments about how they might be more connected to ISP. One level of connection described was at the individual class level. Being invited into a class to present on a specific topic or issue that falls within their skill set was an example. This level of connection was expanded by other staff members, who possess skills in developing co-curricular programs, which they feel would greatly contribute to the “integrative” nature of the Program. Examples of interactions with several departments
include: Communication, Graphic Design, Management. Individual students have come and worked with the Student Center, generally through independent studies. There are possible connections with Theater and Design, Sports and Information and more. Some students might do assessment work at the Student Center. Mark Gempler has gone to professors to see if students would be interested in doing data analysis and survey construction at the Student Center.

The residential life staff noted that there are many other colleges where Residential Life is well connected to Academic Life, e.g., courses taught in residence halls, first-year programs, living learning communities which can strongly support the implementation of ISP. In those cases, Residential Life can provide an enrichment component. It enriches the experience for both students and professors. The college becomes a community of scholars. Integration should mean integrated in all aspects of student life. Colleges in general replicates a fragmented/compartmentalized way of living and for many students learning is a side effect, secondary.

Another concerns is that there is the perception among some adult learners that Keene State College and the faculty are not welcoming to adult learners. A concern was raised that many of today’s students have been so insulated from the concept and actuality of failure, that they lack the skills and coping mechanisms to deal with it when it occurs.

Another concern is that there is a common perception that students with disabilities are seen as a big part of the issue or problem with ITW. However from the staff’s perception, 80% of first year students have trouble with writing, so it is unfair to cast the blame on students with disabilities.

Among staff members who provide direct support to students, there was concern regarding how to bridge the intellectual gap that exists at the beginning of a course without watering down the standards. Previously, non-college level courses filled this void to some extent, but with the changes in the academic program many students find themselves further behind at the outset. These staff members have data that indicates these students succeed as well at KSC as other students that do not face such challenges, but the transition time is greater for them. The staff felt this was especially true in ITW, where their high school experiences were often little more than regurgitation of information rather than critical thought and analysis.

Another issue is IQL. It seems that many students, and staff members, such courses are viewed as “math classes.” Clearly, the mission of the ISP is anything but that, but the feedback is that this presents a challenge for students and staff. A student seeking assistance in such a class is frequently referred to the Math Center. However, based on the way a specific section is being taught, the Math Center maybe of little or no assistance because the true nature of the student’s issue may be the critical thinking or the writing process associated with the analysis. Additionally, tutors for IQL courses are all but non-existent because of the ever-changing nature of the materials and topics being covered. It was noted that the fact that adjunct faculty teach such a large percentage of these ISP course further contributes to this issue. A suggestion was the development of meta-tutors who could assist students with the broader intellectual skills rather than just how the skills are applied to a specific topic or assignment. Tutors trained specifically for IQL courses that are able to address statistics, writing and critical thinking skills simultaneously would seem to fill this void.

Some of the staff see themselves as providing support to students as they meet the academic challenges of the ISP. Support services, accommodations, and adaptive technology are the primary ways in which they feel they are connected to the mission of the ISP. This support however does not end at the concrete level, rather the staff sees themselves supporting students as they strive to adjust to the academic standards of the ISP, which staff believes differs greatly from the expectations that existed in many high schools.
Most staff agreed they have had some opportunity to see students discussing course materials or topics outside the classroom, and in some instances utilizing knowledge they had gained in classes in co-curricular activities. In this way it can be said the ISP is achieving part of its’ mission.

Another recommendations made by staff members include: Working with individual faculty when legally mandated, i.e. web based IQL assignments, being on certain committees, e.g. the High Impact Practices Committee, more and more technology is available and needed to serve their students, more awareness by faculty of Universal Design: for faculty development and education. Then everyone can serve together to empower students better.

**Assessment:**
None of the people had any input on this aspect of the program.