CHAPTER 9. NJIT STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

STANDARD ADDRESSED: This chapter addresses Standard 9 of the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Student Support Services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NJIT maintains a robust, well-articulated system of student support services under the auspices of the Vice President for Academic and Student Services. Students apply to NJIT primarily because of its academic programs. To foster their education and personal development, carefully designed programs are offered to support student engagement and sustained enrollment.

INTRODUCTION: Adhering to the institutional assessment framework defined in the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, NJIT provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution’s goals for students.

NJIT is a student-centered university. The vision of a student-centered campus was originally promoted by President Emeritus Saul Fenster, was carried forward by President Robert A. Altenkirch, and is vigorously embraced by President Joel S. Bloom and Provost Ian Gatley. NJIT Student Support Services are organized under the auspices of the Vice President for Academic and Student Services. Reporting to the Vice President are the following: the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services, who oversees Admissions, Registrar, and Financial Aid; and the Dean of Students, who oversees Residence Life, the Campus Center and Student Activities, Health Services, the Center for Academic and Personal Enrichment, the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, the Office for International Students, and the Center for First Year Students. Also reporting to the Vice President are Athletics, Pre-College Programs, Career Services, Continuing Professional Education, the Educational Opportunity Program, and the Albert Dorman Honors College. A robust, well-articulated system of student services has been an NJIT tradition.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: From Student Orientation to Career Development Services, NJIT is committed to offering a wealth of structured opportunities for academic success and personal growth. Symbolically, the new Campus Center—home base for a growing number of student clubs, a re-invigoration of Greek life, and campus traditions—serves as the hub of educational and social activities for the community. Strolling from the Center to classes, students keep time by the carillon and its fifteen minute chimes.

STUDENT ORIENTATION: There have been significant changes to the administration, design and intended outcomes of orientation. In 2002, the first-year orientation program, originally called Miniversity, occurred in 12-14 small sessions of up to 40 students across the summer. Under the new title “Connections Miniversity,” the orientation program now seeks to connect students to one another, to their college or school, and to the City of Newark.

With the creation of the Center for First Year Students came a new design for Miniversity and a focus on engagement. Added to the title “Miniversity” was the word “Connections.” The intended outcomes were also expanded. Under the new title “Connections Miniversity,” the orientation program presently occurs in 4-5 overnight sessions of 150-250 students. From a student viewpoint, the program seeks to connect students to one another, to their college or school, and to the City of Newark. The intention is for students to feel pleased about their decision to attend NJIT, reassured in their decision by making new friends and mitigating fears about attending college in Newark. During Miniversity, students are introduced to their major field of study and their schedule of classes. They also have an opportunity to choose their roommate if they live on campus, and have an occasion to meet their academic advisors. From an institutional standpoint, the design allows for a larger incoming class size—from 713 first-time, full-time undergraduates
in the fall of 2001 to 903 in the fall of 2011—and allows NJIT to orient the class well before the middle of July. There has also been an achieved economy of scale in dining, entertainment, and degree of variety in presentation.

Connections Miniversity is but one of three components designed to engage students into the NJIT community. The on-line component, Highlander Connections, links students with members of their Miniversity groups and their Cluster Coordinators throughout the summer, providing a comfortable venue for information dissemination and exchange. When first year students arrive in the fall, they enroll in First Year Seminar, a ten-week required course that continues to utilize the Highlander Connections website as a source for out of class activities, articles, and self-assessment instruments. The classroom then becomes a venue for interaction and discussion. Topics include issues of independence and responsibility, adjustment, study skills, and time management, as well as effectively working in groups and dealing with ethical issues.

Connections Miniversity is assessed by each participant at the conclusion of the program. The data suggest that since the 2005 implementation and evolution of the current design, between 95% and 97% of participants concluded that their decision to attend NJIT was a good one; students had positive feelings about their college, intended field of study, and the university.

**STUDENT ACTIVITIES:** With the opening of the Campus Center in 2003-2004, student organizations increased from 94 to 106 in a period of two years. By 2010, 2160 of our students (averaging 20 students per organization) were involved in a club or organization, a distinct increase from 1515 in 2002 (averaging 15 students per organization). Currently, the Campus Center oversees over 128 student organizations, and the number continues to grow.

Because the Greek community represented the strongest alumni base and were traditionally represented among the leaders on campus, the administration saw a need to maintain and build upon a valuable community asset. In 2003-2004 the university began its first meetings regarding the creation of a Greek Village. In 2011 the [Greek Village Task Force](#) concluded that building Greek Houses was financially feasible for the university.

Among the university’s most significant student activities is participation in the Student Senate and the Graduate Student Association. Both organizations play a vital, decision-making role in contexts where students are concerned. Through these two organizations, student voices have a defined role in university governance.

**HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE:** In 2002 NJIT residential capacity had reached 1,450 students with the opening of the final phase of Laurel Hall. In 2010 NJIT expanded its housing stock by block leasing 230 beds in the privately owned University Center. Through the years since 2003, NJIT has maintained an occupancy rate of 97-98%. An additional 360-bed residence hall, as well as housing for approximately 240 members of Greek letter organizations, is currently being planned. With the addition of the [Greek Village](#) in 2013, NJIT is expecting a continued increase in Greek organization membership and the addition of new national organizations.

**BENCHMARKING TO IMPROVE THE NJIT EXPERIENCE:** As part of the integrated system of assessment described in [Chapter 14](#), NJIT utilized Educational Benchmarking, Inc. in 2011 for an on-line survey of 1,680 resident students, with 937 respondents. Residence Life targeted perceptions of satisfaction levels and learning outcomes in key areas. The results showed significant improvements over EBI surveys conducted nearly annually since 2001. On a 7 point scale, overall resident satisfaction was recorded at 5.37, the overall learning experience at 5.21 and the overall program effectiveness at 5.17. These were all significantly higher mean scores than recorded on any of the previous surveys. The highest rankings in our history were also
given to safety and security at \((M = 5.38)\), hall programming at \((M = 5.24)\), room and environment satisfaction \((M = 5.47)\), facilities satisfaction \((M = 5.25)\) and dining services \((M = 4.54)\). Additional high ratings were given to community toleration \((M = 5.75)\) and respect for fellow students \((M = 5.51)\). Key learning outcomes measured included the ability to manage time, study and solve problems. These averaged a score of 5.26. By national comparison, NJIT placed in the top 30% on overall resident life experience (ranking 79 of 284 participating institutions) and time management (ranking 80 of the participating institutions.) On-going investigation of recent initiatives—developing community standards, community policing, continuous dining, on-line room selection, and maintenance request follow-up—will continue to be used to support the NJIT philosophy of continuous, integrated improvement.

ATHLETICS: In the fall of 2004, NJIT embarked on a five year transition process to reclassify its athletic program to the NCAA Division I level, from Division II. This move was made to gain national visibility and to enhance the transition to a residential campus. Over the five year transition, fundraising for athletics increased, facilities were improved, and student life and visibility were enhanced. Regarding fund-raising for athletics, we note that shortly after announcing the intent to reclassifying the athletic program, the school began an ambitious $5M fundraising campaign focused on athletics. This campaign was successfully completed in 2009. As part of the fundraising campaign, three facilities projects were successfully completed. In 2003, the original natural grass field was replaced with synthetic grass. This change allowed for the field to be open and used all year long by a multitude of constituents from both inside (intramurals, convocation) and outside the university (community groups). The second project, begun in 2005, was the rehabilitation of parts of the Fleisher Athletic Center. The main gym area received a new floor, improved lighting, a sound system, and new bleachers. The athletic training room square footage was increased, locker room, weight room and office areas were also improved. A final major facility improvement was the addition of the Naimoli Family Athletic and Recreational Facility, opened in January of 2011. This facility adds another almost 25,000 square feet of open space for use by the athletic program, as well as other campus constituencies.

Investment in athletics has increased the number of talented, high-performing students on campus. These scholar-athletes have received national acclaim. In 2010-11, the Women's Tennis Team captured the Great West Conference title, while the NJIT ice hockey team won the Great Northeast Collegiate Hockey Conference Championship.

TUTORING: Significant changes have occurred in NJIT's approach to tutoring since 2002. What was once known as the ULC, or University Learning Center, has become CAPE, the Center for Academic and Personal Enrichment. CAPE's name reflects a positive emphasis on enrichment rather than a tutorial function. In part as a result of NCAA requirements, the staff now includes two additional full time academic counselors in addition to the director, associate director and peer tutoring staff, with 40 paid and 6 volunteer tutors. Tutors go through a rigorous training program and are evaluated by each student. Tutors meet regularly to discuss tutoring approaches. The staff conducts regular workshops in time management, study skills, and planning.

CAPE collaborates with the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services in the administration of Testing Accommodations for students with disabilities; CAPE also works with the Center for First Year Students in the administration of the APT program for approximately 65 students admitted part-time and with the Academic Success Program for other under-performing first year students. In addition, CAPE works with the Department of Athletics to administer the Highlander Academic Support Program for approximately 130 student-athletes. CAPE also provides tutoring in the residence halls and holds study sessions and finals.
preparation workshops in the Campus Center. In 2010, 765 students, excluding athletes, attended tutoring sessions at CAPE. Assessing the many impacts of CAPE occurs in a variety of ways. CAPE staff report that student-athlete performance was higher than students in general, with an average student-athlete GPA of 2.71. CAPE’s tutors were favorably reviewed by 76% of their clients. CAPE’s efforts with an identified cohort of 40 under-performing first-year students saw 25 of the students achieve a GPA of at least a 2.0 in the spring of 2010, with five students achieving Dean’s List status.

**ACADEMIC INTTEGRITY:** Academic integrity cases are handled, as in 2002, through the Office of the Dean of Students. Students who are charged with integrity violations have the option of the case being heard by administrative review or by a panel, which is the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC), consisting of faculty, students and administrators. In 2006 the Committee on Academic Affairs approved modifications to the PCC, making it possible to call the panel together more rapidly. The ability to adjudicate matters in a more timely fashion and the acquisition of turnitin.com has had excellent outcomes. Out of 46 cases adjudicated in 2010, all were found to be responsible for a violation. Each of the students involved declined to be heard by the panel and accepted the conclusion of the administrative review. No student appealed the decision. Assessments of the process have indicated that it is successful. The impact, nevertheless, is less than desired. A recent survey conducted by the NJIT Student Senate suggests that cheating is mostly handled by faculty and goes unreported. The number of cases adjudicated within the system suggests that more work is needed to promote the use of the system by faculty.

**THE COUNSELING CENTER:** At the last decennial review, the Counseling Center was staffed by three psychologists and a counselor, as well as a support staff member and a group of peer mentors. The center supported a population of 8,828 students. Today, the population has increased by another 1,000 students. The center is largely focused on individual therapy. The center also coordinates disability services and psychological health promotion. As of 2010, the Counseling Center changed its name to CCAPS, or the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, to reflect the full range of psychological and counseling services that are provided. CCAPS has maintained the same level of professional staff and has provided similar services over the past decade, but collaboration with Health Services has increased through activities such as Student Health 101, the NJIT online health magazine, that appears monthly and reaches far more students than peer mentor promotions.

As is the case with most counseling centers across the nation, CCAPS is a busy place. A waiting list for individual therapy will typically appear by mid-semester. Students on the waiting list are triaged and those with serious needs are immediately seen. Group sessions and workshops are offered around various topics, including procrastination, stress management, test anxiety, grief, and alcohol and other drug (AOD) concerns. CCAPS is staffed with specialists in AOD, multicultural counseling/diversity, and men’s issues. CCAPS is also involved at times when students are hospitalized or need to leave campus for risk assessment. The CCAPS Director, the Dean of Students, Director of Residence Life, and Director of Public Safety meet weekly to discuss students of concern. CCAPS also offers a workshop for faculty and staff providing information on recognizing and dealing with stress and is often contacted to provide consultation to faculty and staff. CCAPS staff had 2,586 individual counseling contacts in 2010 and 2951 group contacts—an increase from 2002 with 2,256 individual contacts and 2,659 group contacts.

**DIVISION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES:** The mission of Career Development Services is to assist students and alumni in gaining a clear understanding of their career options and workplace requirements, in obtaining experiential learning opportunities, in developing job search and interviewing skills, and in obtaining meaningful employment in a specialty consistent with their interests.
with their education, experience, and personal goals. CDS conducted over 12,500 career advising sessions in 2010 and facilitated the placement of nearly 400 students in major related co-op work experiences and internships. Students obtained professional experience in a host of positions such as Project Manager, Network Administrator, Applications Engineer, and Research Associate.

CDS is the university’s primary conduit linking students, alumni, faculty, and staff with non-profit organizations and schools located in and around Newark and throughout New Jersey. Over 1,500 NJIT students participated in community service activities in 2010-2011; in the majority of cases the assignments were technology-based and related to the students’ fields of study. The Division serves employers in staffing their organizations with qualified students and graduates and in developing relationships with university faculty and staff. Over 350 employers visited campus last year and another 8,000 posted technology related job requisitions for NJIT students and graduates. More than 3,500 students attended NJIT career fairs and on-campus recruitment interviews.

In 2010, students were asked to report how they attained employment upon graduation. Sixty-nine percent of the 271 total respondents indicated they found employment through the Career Development Services career fair, on-campus recruitment program, job posting service, or as a continuation of a co-op or internship program.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND SUSTAINED ENROLLMENT: Programs focused on orientation, activities, housing, athletics, tutoring, academic integrity, counseling, and career development are designed to create an environment of engagement. To complete this design, NJIT provides infrastructure to ensure that commitment principles of effective retention are implemented.

FINANCIAL AID: The Office of Student Financial Aid Services (SFAS) is as an organizational unit within the university that embodies continuous improvement, self-assessment of the management of student aid, evaluation of the quantity and quality of customer services to students, and implementation of quality improvement strategies. To continue to meet the increased demands of recruiting students to the university, to deliver efficiently student aid to enrolled students while maintaining compliance, and to insure SFAS upholds its commitment to be a student-centered department within the university through a continuous re-evaluation of processes—these are the daily operating procedures of SFAS.

The Office of Student Financial Aid Services has experienced a significant increase in the volume of work it performs. Student financial aid applications increased from 5,162 to 9,563 during award years (AY) 2002 to 2011, an 85 percent increase in the number of applications reviewed on an annual basis for student aid eligibility. New federal aid programs have made NJIT more affordable. The new programs encompassed: TEACH Grant, Academic Competitiveness Grant and the National SMART Grant. The volume of scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study funds disbursed to students also rose dramatically over the past nine years, from $29M in AY 2002 to $58M in AY 2011.

In the past five years there has been a significant increase in summer financial aid as well. Varied computer applications are used to process federal and state aid—and to report, reconcile, and request student aid funding. NJIT has designed a comprehensive student employment management system, PeopleAdmin, as part of Project ORBIT analyzed in Chapter 1. SFAS works to insure full use of NJIT’s Federal Work-Study allocation and has deployed a web system for NJIT student employment. In addition, SFAS develops the content for the university Financial
Aid web pages included in NJIT's website. The site incorporates information about aid delivery, tax implications, articles, and trends on student loan repayments for recent graduates, and other resources. SFAS has implemented a customer service evaluation program. Since NJIT gained NCAA Division I status, the office has implemented compliance with federal regulations for financial aid to athletes. Scholarships for student athletes are processed in accordance with NCAA regulations. Federal and state financial aid programs continue to develop digital initiatives that SFAS staff members have incorporated into their procedures.

The percentage of financial aid need met for the incoming fall 2009 class was near 70%. This goal positively contributes to retention and recruitment efforts by making NJIT more affordable. According to the Princeton Review, NJIT is known for “affordability nationally and in the region” in a survey of academic costs and financial aid. The NJIT average package to students with need for financial support has increased by nearly $3,000; the average package for students not eligible for financial assistance has risen by $1,400. NJIT has also implemented and secured Federal Title IV funding for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) certificate programs for the first time in the university's history. This gain makes graduate CPE certificate students eligible for federal low-interest rate loans and secures income for NJIT.

The past several years have witnessed the demand for educational loans outside of the traditional aid system increase. To remain compliant with federal and state ethics codes, NJIT has implemented a thorough review of the private lender selection process by way of a formal Request for Information (RFI). Based on key factors that are beneficial to students, the lenders are ranked and selected by a committee. This process has secured benefits for students.

**UNIFORM COURSE SCHEDULING:** NJIT has consolidated course scheduling, faculty assignments, and space utilization into an integrated process managed by the Registrar and utilizing software designed by Infosilem. The project began in 2007 and is now in operation. The master schedule of courses is designed to support NJIT’s academic programs and help students complete their degree requirements in a timely fashion. A consolidated review of student enrollment and degree programs has indentified course combinations by class year and major that must be scheduled without conflict. The Infosilem software has helped NJIT schedule these course combinations in conjunction with faculty and classroom resources so that students can register for conflict free course combinations that are required to progress toward graduation. As a result, the first-year class is now scheduled as a group based upon each student's course placements—along with special cohort affiliation such as the Albert Dorman Honors College, the Educational Opportunity Program, and student athletes.

**HEALTH SERVICES:** Retention of students is the result of complex variable interactions, both cognitive and affective, and among the most significant is the role of student health. As such, efforts dedicated to improving health services are an important part of student support services. In 2002, NJIT Health Services staff consisted of two nurses and visiting physicians contracted from University Hospital in Newark. A visiting physician provided two hours of service per day, Monday to Friday. Today, NJIT Health Services has a full-time physician, a full-time registered nurse, and a temporary part-time registered nurse. The full time physician has allowed for greater continuity of care. Health Services provides a full range of primary care, vaccinations, and tuberculosis screening. The function of Health Services has continued to provide primary care to the NJIT international student population, to the growing undergraduate residential population, and to undergraduate and graduate commuter students. 3,294 students were seen in 2010, doubling the number seen in 2002. The impact of the service is substantial and was particularly important during the H1N1 pandemic. Flu vaccination clinics were offered to the student population during the H1N1 outbreak. Student medical insurance benefits were increased to
provide greater major medical benefits, prescription coverage and specialist visit coverage. An on-line insurance waiver for students with existing medical insurance was also instituted since 2002.

OUTREACH AND PRECOLLEGE PROGRAMS: The Center for Pre-College Programs was established in 1978 in order to increase access to scientific and technological fields among traditionally underrepresented populations and to improve the teaching of science and mathematics in secondary and elementary schools. Achievement is reflected in the accomplishments of its many pre-college alumni. All programs involve corporate partners, local school districts, non-profit educational organizations, and NJIT. The corporate partners provide classroom speakers, financial support, role models, field trips, and expertise in the teaching of science and engineering. Over two decades of involvement in pre-college science and engineering programs have convinced NJIT and its partners that intervention must begin in the elementary grades. As a result, NJIT has greatly increased its activities aimed at improving science teaching in the classroom and reforming the elementary science curriculum as early as kindergarten. The Center for Pre-College Programs annually serves more than 3,000 elementary and secondary students and their teachers in a variety of programs. Annually, approximately 150 NJIT first-year students, typically from minority groups, have participated in the Center for Pre-College Programs prior to enrolling in NJIT.

CONCLUSIONS: Working Group 5 was charged to determine compliance with MSCHE Standard 9: Student Support Services. The Working Group found that NJIT had achieved exemplary performance in designing procedures to address the varied spectrum of student academic and other needs, in a manner that is equitable, supportive, and sensitive, through direct service or referral.

The Working Group found that NJIT had achieved emerging excellence in the following areas: a program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission, consistent with student learning expectations, and available regardless of place or method of delivery; qualified professionals to supervise and provide the student support services and programs; athletic programs that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles, norms, and procedures that govern other institutional programs; reasonable procedures, widely disseminated, for equitably addressing student complaints or grievances; records of student complaints or grievances; policies and procedures, developed and implemented, for safe and secure maintenance of student records; published and implemented policies for the release of student information; and ongoing assessment of student support services and the utilization of assessment results for improvement.

The Working Group found that NJIT had met the following standards: appropriate student advisement procedures and processes.

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE: After extensive deliberation on the university’s commitment to providing student support services necessary for students to achieve our institution’s goals, NJIT has identified the following area of improvement. This area will be integrated into the strategic planning process:

1. NJIT will coordinate, strengthen, and evolve the existing framework of student support services and academic programs to improve retention and graduation.