Recommendation #1: Instructional Supply and Demand

Rationale:
Currently, there is no formal method for establishing instructional needs and ensuring that resources are in place to meet these needs. Allocation of base budgets to Schools/Colleges and departments do not reflect analysis of instructional expectations or trends. Central funds to support General Education are locked into a distribution established for the most part decades ago. Changes in enrollment patterns do not produce changes in resource allocation. As a result, meeting student demand in a timely and effective way is left largely to improvisation on the part of individual units. Units experiencing increasing demand have few good options, resulting in unplanned growth in class size, reduction in lab experiences, cancellation of sections, or other cost-cutting measures that affect instructional quality. Units experiencing decreasing demand have greater flexibility, but no formal expectations either to improve quality or stimulate demand. Over time this has led to substantial imbalances across units, imbalances which are exacerbated by periodic base budget reductions, long-term enrollment growth, and curricular changes. Recent efforts to better align resources with instructional demand, such as the out-of-state student revenue sharing initiative, provide modest mitigation but no fundamental solution.

The effect on student satisfaction and completion is significant. Student progress is disrupted when courses are not available when needed, or course capacity prevents student enrollment. The processes of monitoring student progress, managing student changes of major, and providing effective advising are all complicated by the lack of predictability in course offerings. Campus-wide expectations for instructional quality are eroded when demand exceeds supply. Current University policies may be ineffective or inefficient for today’s student and curriculum and student enrollment complexities. We must help these students make timely progress, in a program of their choice that makes sense academically, and with access to courses when and as needed.

Recommendation:
There is a need for a resource allocation strategy tied to student enrollment and course delivery expectations so that effective resources are being intentionally targeted (through a redistribution or additional resource allocation strategy) for student enrollment and course delivery bottleneck areas. A campus-wide system for analyzing and projecting instructional demand must be put in place. Attention should be paid to: courses offered by departments to their majors; service courses to the general student body; courses used for purposes such as minors, certificates, and pre-requisites for a major; and General Education courses. Clear responsibility for managing instructional supply and demand should be assigned at each level. Responsibility for balancing the overall system resides with the Provost’s Office. Each School/College must maintain or develop a coordinated strategy and identify college-level staff responsibility for coordinating with the Provost’s Office. Enrollment management strategies are also critical as the student enrollment has increased on campus overall, and in certain majors in particular. The enrollment management planning and information flow of student enrollment to schools/colleges/majors will allow for advanced planning of course delivery needs and the management of instructional resources.
Recommendation #2: An Alternative Model Assisting Student Degree Completion

Rationale:
There are currently 1,972 Undeclared students, including 1,184 new entering first-year students (OIR, Fall 2012) in both a voluntary (a student who is unclear as to the major they would like to pursue) and involuntary (a student who was not accepted directly into their choice of major, but attends the University to take predictor courses to try to gain acceptance into this major) capacity. Undeclared students are not part of an academic school/college, there are no instructional faculty in the Undeclared area, there is no School/College/Department curriculum, and they are advised by a unit that stands outside all of the schools and colleges. [Undeclared students are encouraged to declare a major by mid-sophomore year. This may often involve these students choosing a major that is not their primary interest as they could not gain acceptance into their first choice major, choosing a major by default in order to take courses within that major, or choosing a major because it is open and they do not know where else to turn. We can do a better job with these students including a sense of connection to the University right when they step foot on campus (in a degree-granting program), assisting them in a discipline or field of interest that may be better for them, and providing them with a more intentional pathway toward degree completion. Another cohort of student worthy of additional attention and support are the students who may begin their college career within a declared major, but are experiencing academic difficulty or determine the major is no longer of interest to them. We need to develop a method of assisting these students in finding and making a smooth transition into a degree granting program that makes sense to them academically.

Recommendation:
To charge the Vice Provost of Undergraduate and Continuing Education to study the creation of a new Bachelor Degree of Integrated Studies. [Description of BDIS inserted here. Be cautious about sounding remedial. Innovative pedagogy? A student is in a degree granting program the minute they step foot on campus.] In addition, a Task for should be formed and charged to review University policies impacting student progress toward degree completion, with recommendations made to support students needing earlier intervention and assistance.

Recommendation #3: Student Success Steering Committee

Rationale:
Resources allocated to Student Success Initiatives are fractured with no strategic approach or coordination to the planning and resource commitment devoted toward these initiatives. There are a number of initiatives and programs across campus aimed at helping students transition to college, improve student retention, provide support mechanisms, assist students in getting a good start and progress satisfactorily toward graduation. These include initiatives and programs overseen and implemented by Student Affairs, Residential Life, Academic Affairs, Schools/Colleges/Departments, and other units on campus (e.g., CMASS, Learning Resource Center, Writing Center, Disability Services, Undergraduate Advising & Learning Communities, etc.). Some examples of programs/initiatives include RFYE: Residential First Year Experience, FTY: First Two Years, Transformations: Transfer students, UMCCC: UMass Community College Connection, NSO: New Student Orientation, RAP: Residential Academic Programs, Residential Hall themes and learning communities, Working Group on Student Success, First Year Seminars (a variety of models in place currently), and the Undergraduate Coordinating Council. One of the chief advantages of the immersive, residential experience is the opportunity it provides to extend the educational experience beyond the classroom. We have talented and committed staff and significant resources available to support the living-learning experience, but we do not currently have a common strategy to put those resources to best use. The campus needs a united
approach, common vision, and overarching organizational structure charged with overseeing Student Success Initiatives.

Recommendation:
The Chancellor and Provost are charged with forming an overarching centralized Student Success Steering Committee to inventory the student success initiatives occurring across campus, identify the campus-wide student learning outcomes we are pursuing with these activities, assessing efficacy of current programs/initiatives, and determine possible efficiencies and the integration of these activities. This Steering Committee will be charged with unifying and integrating the work of the various committees on student success, and developing a common campus vision and united approach on Student Success Initiatives. This will include overseeing and assessing all Student Success Initiatives taking place in the residential halls, residential academic programming, initiatives involving retention and support of various student cohorts (i.e., Transfer students, Sophomores, Juniors, underrepresented minorities), and programming focused on Student Success. The Steering Committee will make recommendations for resource allocations tied to the overarching Student Success Initiatives to promote efficiencies and effective strategies surrounding Student Success Initiatives.

Recommendation #4: Student Advising Model and Support
Rationale:
A critical piece to a student’s experience on campus revolves around the role of advising. The campus has both a centralized (Undergraduate Advising Office) and decentralized (School/College advising units as well as departmental advising) model. The effectiveness of this model is challenged by the complexity of School/College/major requirements across campus, student enrollment in certain Schools/Colleges/majors, limited to non-existent recognition, training and support for faculty involved in advising, turnover of faculty advisors, among other things. Usage of technology and appropriate products/software to assist in the tracking of student progress, earlier intervention alert systems, appropriate selection of major and curriculum design can significantly improve the student advising experience, and yet this campus does not have an effective product in place. Some students are craving and are in need of more intentional advising for what they are interested in, or to assist them in making good academic decisions in progressing toward degree completion. We owe it to our students to provide a quality advising experience contributing toward improved student retention and progress toward degree completion.

Recommendation:
The Provost’s Office is charged with studying this issue and implementing a more intentional campus-wide approach to student advising, including an advising organizational structure and infrastructure with clear expectations of campus, School/College, department advising standards and guidelines. There is a need for an effective student support “tracking and advising system” to provide the campus with a product that will assist with timely, effective student advising support. Training and support mechanisms need to be in place for all advisors (whether professional staff or faculty) covering campus-wide advising standards and guidelines, usage of technology in innovative ways to assist with informative communications to relevant parties (students, advisors, undergraduate deans, Registrar’s Office), among other innovative advising practices that may be implemented (i.e., peer advising model, advising website for students and advisors, etc.). Appropriate incentives for faculty and departments with dedicated resources to develop effective advising practices.