

Continuous Improvement at the Evans School

The Evans School operates in the belief that the educational process is dynamic and maintains that the 21st century learning environment is characterized by exchange. Students enrolling in the Evans School are welcomed as members of the community together with faculty and staff.

Opportunities for student involvement, feedback, and critique:

- **Student organizations** have a voice in the Evans community and they make their priorities clear by hosting events that highlight their interests and concerns; they also have opportunities to work directly with administrators in Student Services and the Dean's Office
- **Student representation** on faculty committees gives students awareness of the issues that are under debate by faculty; students represent their own perspective to committee members and carry the issues back to their peers
- **Periodic open meetings** with the Dean (formal annual meetings and informal breakfast or lunch meetings throughout the year)
- **Community fora** such as e-News and listservs allow individuals and groups a means to make announcements, speak their mind and/or seek support of the community
- **Periodic surveys**—the annual climate survey, the annual post-graduation survey, and employer feedback from internships provide important overall assessments; occasional ad hoc surveys are used to gauge community views on a particular issue
- **Course evaluations**—course by course evaluations of the student experience in the classroom
- **Student performance** in course work and on degree projects—as students advance through the program, their skill strengths and deficits from earlier learning become evident to the faculty; degree projects demonstrate an overall mastery of core objectives
- **Alumni tracking**—career success among Evans School alumni is an indicator of the success of the educational program in preparing our students for the challenges of public administration.

How each source of feedback is considered in review and planning is somewhat unique, dependent upon its context. Some channels are relatively direct, such as course evaluations. Instructors review the evaluations after they finish teaching any particular course, and may implement responsive changes the very next quarter.

Other feedback is assembled from a variety of channels and may result in a much more sweeping initiative. These initiatives arise out of a strategic planning process that includes representatives of the entire community—those that have recognized problems and issues, and those who have evaluated survey results. Once the issues are assessed and assembled into problem areas, priorities are identified and agreed upon, and initiatives that address a problem set in the broadest way are undertaken.

Improvements to the degree programs and the student experience in the past 5 years include:

Strengthened student and career services

We hired a Director of Student Services (now the Assistant Dean for Student Services) in fall 2004 and restructured our student services office, enhanced recruiting staff, and have hired (winter 2005) a new Director of Executive Education. The office is designed to be more welcoming, is running more efficiently, and both students and staff have noted the improvements.

Added new faculty in areas of high demand

New faculty hires have and will continue to reduce advising demands and help to ensure faculty remain accessible and classes are available. In addition, a full-time senior administrative staff person now provides support to faculty to alleviate some administrative duties from faculty workloads to free additional faculty time for students.

Acquired more space for students and improved quality of their space

In 2003-04, we purchased new furniture for the student lounge, replaced old monitors with flat screens in the computer lab, invested in wireless internet access for the building, designated a TA meeting space for tutoring help, and set aside a period of study in a quiet room for individual and group work space. *However, student study and computer space remains inadequate and we are seeking sustainable solutions for this.*

Improving communications

The Evans School intranet allows the administration and faculty to post shared documents for greater transparency; we clarified our admissions process; a revised bulletin and other recruiting materials reflect changes and growth in programs; and a more user-friendly and informative website for internal and external users debuted in January 2008.

Initiated stronger links between students and the administration to enhance community

The building's coffee shop reopened in 2004 and continues to be a meeting ground for conversation; quarterly meetings with the Dean encourage student feedback throughout the year; the Evans Student Organization (ESO) meets regularly with the Dean to communicate student concerns and

suggestions; and the Dean is working with the Assistant Dean for Student Services to further enhance opportunities to enrich community, such as a recent all-school bowling competition and annual silent auction and talent show. In addition, the recent hiring of a Director of Executive Education will help to create stronger connections between executive MPA students and traditional MPA students.

Made recruitment packages more competitive

To strengthen the School's capacity to recruit top applicants, financial award packages have been increased significantly. Funds made available for the 2007 incoming M.P.A. class exceeded any previous year. A commitment to providing financial support (fellowships or graduate assistantships) to highly qualified, diverse applicants is a strong priority.

Enriching opportunities for student participation in civic engagement

The Dean sponsors biannual student trips to Olympia for students to meet with Evans School alumni working in state government and key legislators and staff. New efforts to expand opportunities for civic engagement among our students are being developed. The Assistant Dean for Student Services is also working throughout the local community to organize volunteer opportunities for students.

Increasing access to classrooms in Parrington Hall

The Evans School administration is working to have more Evans School courses offered in Parrington Hall. Growth in enrollments, faculty demand for better classroom facilities, and some downsizing in the rated capacity of Parrington Hall classrooms have reduced the number of courses offered our building. We are working to acquire greater classroom space priority for Evans School courses and to enhance the classroom facilities so as to have more classes in Parrington.

Accommodating student choice for course scheduling

Multiple-section courses are offered at a variety of times and days to allow for the greatest variety of student schedules. Single section courses are more evenly arranged so that there are fewer conflicts between courses as well. Responsive to student concerns, the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs also sought to balance three-hour class sessions (which meet weekly) and twice-weekly one-and-a-half hour course offerings.

Developing a two-year course schedule

We are working on a two-year course plan that will provide information to students about the courses that will be available for this period. This should help students plan their degree programs and assist faculty with advising.

Implementing administrative performance measures

We are establishing meaningful quantitative measures for each of our administrative units in order to facilitate consistent tracking and enable

reporting. This will enable steadier progress toward strategic goals and greater transparency.

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