

# Survey Services



## CASE STUDY

### Improving Channels of Communication at University of Louisiana at Monroe

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*Dr. Eric Pani,  
Associate Provost,  
The University of Louisiana at Monroe*

#### The University

The University of Louisiana at Monroe, having recently celebrated its 75th anniversary, maintains its commitment to the belief that students come first—they are not just a number. Founded as a two-year college, ULM has for many years been an upper-level institution offering doctorates in Pharmacy, Education, and Marriage and Family Counseling. ULM serves approximately 9,000 students from throughout northeastern Louisiana as well as students from across the state and beyond. With the arrival of President James Cofer in 2002 came a renewed commitment to students’ needs and the slogan, “Reclaiming Our Campus.”

Located on the banks of the beautiful Bayou DeSiard, water activities take center stage, and for ULM this means a national water-skiing team that has won 19 national titles in the past 27 years. It also boasts an aviation program with three state-of-the-art flight simulators, in which everything from a Piper to a space shuttle can be “flown.” Pilots needing continuing education credits come to ULM, the only aviation program in the state that is FAA-certified and publicly funded. ULM is also home to the state’s only publicly funded pharmacy, meteorology, gerontology, and marriage and family counseling programs.

#### The Situation and Process

Dr. Eric Pani, Associate Provost, and Robin Logan, Executive Director of University Planning and Analysis, spoke recently about the University’s reasons for using ACT’s *Student Opinion Survey* (SOS). Funded by the Louisiana State Board of Regents, the SOS and SOS two-year were administered statewide at all public two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions from 2000–2005. ULM continued the project at its own expense in the seventh year and as part of the project funded by the University of Louisiana System in the eighth and ninth year. Dr. Cofer saw the data from the SOS as a way of keeping communication flowing between students and the organization.

ULM serves a student population with needs outside those of students at many universities. A sizeable number of their students are commuter and/or nontraditional. Many students are first generation who live in small towns, work many hours a week, and make a commute as long as two hours one way to attend classes.

## The Outcomes

Student feedback from the SOS has become a major source of information about what needs to be done to best serve ULM's students and how funding should be allocated to keep the students at the center of attention. Therefore, SOS results have been used to identify and make necessary improvements, including the following:

- Academic advising items received low satisfaction ratings. After investigating the situation, the university incorporated the advising center into the Student Success Center, which now handles all academic advising as well as a number of other student services.
- Residence hall ratings were low. A \$62 million project was undertaken, "most definitely at the top of the list due to the SOS results," to address this issue. To date, most dorms have been demolished and replaced with new apartment buildings with high speed internet hookups, cable, and other amenities. This has led to noticeably improved satisfaction ratings.
- Food Services received low ratings. The decision was made to outsource to a dining service and open a number of franchised eating establishments on campus.
- Personal security/safety was identified as a concern. The university now has new on-campus lighting, emergency telephones, and increased police staffing as well as a police bicycle patrol.
- Parking ratings were extremely low. ULM is currently constructing a new parking facility, which will add much needed parking space.
- The Student Union received very low ratings. A total renovation of the building was planned and completed.

Work is ongoing to improve other facilities and grounds areas, as they are obviously important to the students. Much of the work that has been done has been with an eye toward recreating the imagery of the campus at the time it was built. At present, work is underway to renovate the campus entryway to match, as closely as possible, the first entryway. Much of the work and all of the funding for this project has been provided by students.

Findings from the survey are shared with many different groups. The Faculty Senate responded to students' low ratings of academic advising items by working with others to incorporate the advising center into the Student Success Center. The data are used for benchmarking, valuable for identifying areas of need and areas of improvement. Currently in the SAC's Reaffirmation process, ULM can point to student satisfaction on those things obviously of interest to the accreditation team. "Anything that we can identify as a problem with the SOS results and correct will help us with accreditation," said Dr. Pani. He feels that all of these improvements have had a direct impact on retention.

## Why ACT's Survey Services?

The University of Louisiana at Monroe is a campus bustling with serious students with a variety of needs. ACT's Student Opinion Survey has been used there since 2000 as a tool to consistently collect data that can be used to:

- help keep the students in the spotlight
- identify those things that are problematic for students
- make plans and fund corrections
- benchmark improvement

All of these efforts have led to students who are pleased with the academic and other experiences they are having at ULM. Administrators plan to continue using the SOS as an important venue for communicating with their students.

To learn more about ACT's Survey Services, write [outcomes@act.org](mailto:outcomes@act.org) or call **800/294-7027**.