

Job 1:

Satisfied customers

BY JOHN BEAHLER

It wasn't quite like a phone call from home. But this fall, during their first six weeks at Mizzou, nearly one-third of all new freshmen received a telephone call from the student affairs division.

Volunteers asked freshmen how they were settling into the routine of classes and campus life, answered questions and helped them work through problems. Most students had positive things to say about their first weeks at Mizzou. The difficulties they mentioned ranged from homesickness to meeting the challenges of demanding new classes.

"I think we probably learned more from this exercise than the freshmen did," says Dr. Charles Schroeder, vice chancellor for student affairs. "We

wanted to see if there are common themes or problems they were experiencing."

Businesses have embraced the idea of total quality management as a way to bolster their bottom line. In the corporate world, that means marshaling the organization's resources in a never-ending pursuit of customer satisfaction and quality improvement.

MU is emphasizing its commitment to students in much the same way. But in this case, the bottom line is student success — doing what it takes to keep students at Mizzou and help them

MU retention

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Freshmen | 82% |
| Graduation after six years | 56% |

graduate. Provost Gerald Brouder puts it this way: "We are rededicating the MU campus to students."

Building a user-friendly, customer-oriented campus that focuses on the student as a whole person is a top priority of Chancellor Charles Kiesler. Schroeder adds, "When students feel connected, when they feel involved, they do well."

A case in point: How can residence halls become learning communities built around academic themes? This fall, a program called the Freshman Success Initiative began channeling intensive advising and tutoring services to students living in the all-freshman Donnelly Hall.

At Donnelly, the number of residence assistants was more than doubled, from four to nine. Residence hall staff initiated a study-partner program. Tutoring is offered for students who are enrolled in math, English and some large lecture classes — the kind of courses that often give freshmen fits. Workshops allow residents to interact with some of the University's top faculty members.

"The idea is to spot problems early on and resolve them," Schroeder says. "We know that the first six weeks seem to be critical for freshmen."

Aimee Ziegler, a resident assistant in Donnelly Hall, says the Freshman Success Initiative means she can forge closer ties with her charges. That might mean proofreading an English 20 paper, walking students through the process of

Why students succeed

All students are different, and there are different reasons why some stay at a university until they graduate and others leave after a semester or two. However, national research has found some common themes:

Academic integration — Students are more likely to be successful when they have good study habits, know what they want to major in and don't skip class. Relationships with faculty can make a difference in student success.

Social integration — A social support system can be just as important as academic ties. That system includes close friends on campus and informal relationships with faculty and staff.

A student's "fit" with the institution — For instance, students are in for a rude awakening if they come to MU expecting a "party school" where they won't have to crack a book. Some students feel more at home at a small college, while others are more challenged at a major research university.

Financial considerations — Scholarships, grants and work-study programs can help students focus on their classes. The hours they spend on part-time jobs can eat into study time. Trying to maintain a high standard of living on a student budget prompts some students to leave school.

dropping a class, or showing them where each of their classes will be held.

"Having all freshmen — there's a lot of positive energy. They're excited. They want to learn and they want to get involved," says Ziegler, a senior from St. Louis majoring in educational and counseling psychology.

The residence hall initiative won't stop with freshmen, Schroeder adds. "We're exploring the feasibility of creating a fine arts residential college, academic interest houses for engineering, nursing and law students, as well as developing a residence hall that encourages intense student and faculty interaction."

Many of the changes under way in Mizzou's residence halls are driven by market demand, says Roger Fisher, director of residential life. "Many of the options, such as the peer group halls, came about as the result of a survey our office conducted in 1991." The peer group halls serve specific populations. One hall for juniors and seniors, and another for students 21 and older were full when school started this year. "We had the opportunity to discover what students really wanted," Fisher adds.

What does the college student of the '90s expect from a residence hall? Some perks can be fairly routine. Cable television and telephone voice mail now are standard. "We put coin changers and ice machines in all the halls recently," Fisher says. "That was a direct result of

High-school graduates



| | Missouri | U.S. |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1977-78 | 64,564 | 2.8 million |
| 1990-91 | 46,928 | 2.3 million |
| Decline | 27.3% | 17.8% |

Sources: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; National Center for Educational Statistics

the satisfaction surveys. We're listening to our customers."

The effort is paying off. A higher percentage of last year's residents renewed their housing contracts this year. Schurz Hall, which was closed last year because of a lack of residents, has reopened and houses 400 students this year.

Flexibility is high on the list of student demands. This year there are more housing and meal options; students are guaranteed a single room if they want one.

Student retention is one result of a quality learning environment. Currently, about 82 percent of all freshmen re-enroll for their sophomore year at MU. After six years, 56 percent of Mizzou students will earn a diploma, and another 1 percent to 2 percent still will be enrolled. A campuswide faculty task force

recommended this fall that freshman retention rates be boosted to 85 percent over the next five years, and it set a graduation rate goal of 60 percent to 65 percent.

"In some ways I think Mizzou is a sleeping giant," Schroeder adds. "MU attracts high quality youngsters. If you look at the price-to-value ratio, MU is a tremendous educational bargain."

"Kiesler's renewed commitment to undergraduate education is going to enhance the value of an MU education that much more." ☐

What students want

A 1991 survey looked at the level of student satisfaction in MU residence hall living. These are the most important factors students mentioned:

- Independence, privacy and personal space
- Cost of residence halls
- Food services
- Cooking, laundry and recreational facilities
- Friends who live in residence halls
- Conveniences and luxuries, such as change and stamp machines, air conditioning, weight rooms and saunas, and computers
- Social interaction areas