An initial assessment of the impact of the establishment of a Student Support Services unit within Student Development was conducted during the fall of 2002. Over a four-week period, Directors and Department Chairs participating in the unit were interviewed to collect their comments on the organizational process, the result, and the impact.

Process
Comments on the processes which were used in the implementation of the reorganization were generally positive, acknowledging the need to propel the initiative forward from the executive level:

- Large group meetings were purposeful, but not very productive, while small group meetings across the units and resulting reports were very helpful in that they empowered people to impact their areas.
- A stronger demarcation between departments would have helped, especially if it had been accompanied with a marketing campaign to minimize the stress on students and maximize the accessibility of services to students.
- Lack of involvement from areas not directly affected was a bit uncomfortable, like ‘participant observers’, causing those areas to take the initiative to define their perceived relationship to the new departments.
- Students were left out of the loop and issues regarding available space were left hanging.
- Orientation meetings were helpful – but I’ve not yet discovered how the College really functions.
- It had to come from the top – it couldn’t have happened any other way.
- With strong leadership among key people - it worked – and resistance always prevailed in the past!

Product
Comments on the result of the reorganization were quite positive, especially with regard to the cohesion of the new unit:

- The new structure reflects the needs of the students; it’s very positive and quite functional.
- People made cautious choices and pretty much stayed in traditional areas.
- Faculty and staff within and across departments are working together well.
- As departments continue to gel, clarity improves.
- Consistency of coverage and hours of operation have improved.
- New department chairs have really good skills, making it easy to work with them.
- Distribution of counselors left some units without adequate support – and with continued worries despite promises of additional support.
- Classified staff issues remain unsettled in some departments.
- Space remains an issue in most departments.
Impact

Comments on the impact were most dramatic, with a variety of recommendations to keep the momentum going:

- Just look at the faculty and staff – many have been completely transformed!
- Communications have improved immeasurable – and now need to be reinforced with in-service and cross-training.
- Collaboration has increased tremendously, producing less isolation and more reinforcement – and a better working environment!
- Accessibility to services has increased as hours of operation of the various departments have been expanded.
- Teamwork within departments has increased significantly – we’re coming together.
- Business has picked up for some departments and been fairly slow for others.
- Service delivery has improved – and continues to improve as a high priority as departments reach out to students and the college-at-large.
- In-service training has - and will continue to increase.
- We have begun to use available information to target services to students who might need them, e.g., using application information to communicate regarding career planning services, etc.
- The DSS meetings have been most helpful in developing new working relationships and information sharing as we strive to do things together.
- Departmental status has been a tremendous boost – providing access to budgets, grants, and colleagues – very helpful!
- Morale – as well as creativity, industry, and energy level - went from the depths to the pinnacle.
- We need to be ever mindful of the need to support diversity within and among the staffs of our departments.

Basically, leaders agreed that the move has been beneficial in a variety of ways, and that the challenge remaining lies in the clarification of the ‘gray areas’, the development of staffing and the provision of space. It is also anticipated that the move to caseload will increase student support; however, we all need to work on communications within and among departments, with students, and with faculty and staff. Perhaps a staff directory by department would help interdepartmental communications among faculty and staff. Additionally, we need to strengthen linkages among departments to support a robust student referral network – perhaps an ‘e-referral’ system – with maps showing the locations of the services. Outreach to students with promotion and advertising of services – on site and on the web - and signage will help immeasurably!

Now we need to keep people refreshed, enthusiastic and on track with orientations for new counselors, with program updates and new service delivery strategies for continuing counselors, and with new initiatives such as faculty exchanges, internships, and other professional development opportunities!