

Student Engagement and Campus Life Strategic Working Group: Draft Proposal

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Working Group Charge: Identify sustainable services, and experiences that enliven the campus, engage students in social, fun, and educational experiences that enhance students' sense of belonging, and their satisfaction with experiences at SUNY Oswego.

Process Overview: The working group met biweekly during the 2021 Fall semester. In order to fulfill our charge, we utilized the following tools and methods:

- Inventory of current campus offerings
- Review of existing data sets on student belonging at SUNY Oswego
- Gap review of where current offerings miss key student demographics, needs, or factors in helping the develop a sense of belonging with campus
- Benchmark against other SUNY comprehensives and aspirational institutions

Summary of Recommendations

I. Reinvigorating Our Campus Identity: Short Term Recommendations

- a) **Overview:** Pre-Covid, students had reported a strong affinity with their student organizations, majors, and schools/colleges. However, campus identity around the term “Laker” had been underdeveloped. Student engagement with a College specific identity is therefore somewhat parochial, leaving an opportunity to grow connection and affinity points within a larger, communal identity across campus. With the recent decline of residence hall utilization, an increase in student-friendly housing in the surrounding community, and accessibility of online learning during the pandemic, helping our off campus/commuting student population build a sense of affinity with campus is an opportunity that up until this point has been largely underleveraged. Next steps in initiating some of the below would be to engage with Communications, Alumni, Enrollment Management, Athletics, FYE, and Orientation to develop a cohesive branding strategy for “lakers” past, present and future to identify with. Aesthetic measures like office area updates are attainable through currently existing project funding, but building aesthetics and signage would likely require larger finding requests. The emphasis here should be on “low hanging fruit” like individual offices, while larger updates to signage, and buildings be a factor for the capital projects committee to roll into future projects.

Common Hour discussions should involve the Provost/Registrar to assess a willingness to build time into the course schedule, and an office, such as Campus Life, should be identified as the coordinator of activities and offerings during the College Hour. Past iterations of this initiative were run by the Student Association, and suffered from a lack of institutional coordination.

b) Recommendations

i) Campus Spirit

- 1) Green and Gold Days: Implement and promote recurring “Green and Gold Days” where students, faculty and staff wear SUNY Oswego gear and apparel
 - (a) Leverage popular platforms such as instagram and snapchat to generate authentic user content to reach online learners
- 2) Mascot: Increase energy, engagement, and the ties to the “Laker” identity by developing a mascot
- 3) Fight Song: Create a communal experience at Laker Hockey games by creating and implementing a “fight song”
 - (a) This would also help to promote positive crowd interactions as part of the live game experience
- 4) Leverage the Orientation “Welcome” as a way to introduce students to spirit traditions via a new “Whiteout Welcome”
 - (a) Hold the welcome in the arena
 - (b) Play Whiteout Highlights from WTOP 10
 - (c) Introduce students to appropriate student section crowd chants
 - (d) Everybody gets a whiteout game towel
- 5) Campus Aesthetic
 - (a) Facilities on campus lack an institutional identity
 - (i) Wide array of architectural designs across campus
 - (ii) Building interiors are often “institutional” with little to no reference to campus colors (Green and Gold), identifiers (Go Lakers), or campus traditions (a color run mural in Lee)
 - (iii) Signage on campus is functional, not inspirational
 - (1) Lack of campus mottos, and insufficient distribution beyond Sweet road/104 entrance
 - (iv) Identify high traffic SA/College (the Compass) offices willing to be a part of “spirit” updates to their areas.

ii) Common Hour

- 1) Implement a “common hour”, where classes are not scheduled on a regular day, and time in the academic calendar
 - (a) 2pm-3pm or 3pm-4pm; 1 to 2 times per week
 - 2) This would allow all students, but particularly commuter students, the opportunity to:
 - (a) engage and attend student organization activities,
 - (b) visit offices and services that may not hold evening hours, and attend college sponsored events that may not be offered at a time conducive to their class/work schedules
 - (c) Engage online or virtual learners with hybrid offerings
 - (d) A SUNY CUCAP Fall straw poll among 14 participating colleges revealed that
 - (i) 7 of the 14 currently hosted a common hour
 - (ii) 4 of the 14 stated that they previously had a common hour, but it was reduced or eliminated due to expanded classes schedules during the pandemic
 - (iii) 11 of the 14 reported that their current or former common hours saw an increase in engagement and interaction with commuter and off campus students
- iii) Office of Off Campus Student Support
- 1) Establish a dedicated office to support commuter, off campus, and online learners
 - (a) A Fall 2021 survey of the SUNY comprehensive colleges, and SUNY Centers revealed that:
 - (i) 10 of the 17 had dedicated support for off campus students

II. Addressing Affinity and Belonging Gaps: Intermediate Recommendations

- a) Overview: Several departments have developed programs and initiatives to address the needs of new first year students. Yet, as new student withdrawals within the first few weeks of the semester would indicate, these offerings in their current construction may not be iterative enough to establish a strong sense of belonging, particularly as standalone programs. An intentionally sequenced, and collaborative coordination of these FYE efforts would likely see stronger, more solidified connections between students, faculty and their peers. There is also a need to establish or identify an office/department with a focus on providing programmatic, co-curricular experiences for all students. While the term “student activities” is dated, providing consistent, meaningful opportunities for students to engage out of the classroom requires a dedicated approach, and can be effective in addressing programming gaps we currently experience, such as weekend

programs and late night alternatives. A re-envisioning of Student Involvement would be a natural fit for these types of duties. Further, addressing opportunities to more comprehensively affirm the identities of our diverse student population, and reflect their belief in the need for community action would serve to create more affinity points for current students. An area of continued growth is the development of dedicated, professional support for our LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, the development of a comprehensive series of opportunities focused on civic engagement, and community service presents itself as an opportunity to allow students to engage meaningfully in community action, which is a hallmark of this current generation of college admits. Infrastructure to accomplish many of these recommendations already exists, with representation from faculty, staff and students. The FYE Advisory Council already sets out to establish and create opportunities for campus partners to collaborate on first year student offerings, and would be a logical leader in establishing a cohesive set of FYE learning outcomes. The same goes for the Civic Engagement Coalition, which has been programmatic in nature but has the existing capacity to create a collaborative set of CE/CS learning outcomes. Adoption and integration of the outcomes would require a comment/feedback opportunity for affected areas, like Campus and Residence Life and Housing. With the creation of the Institute, general support strategies for the LGTB+ population could be developed conceptually at this level. However, it is unclear what their day-to-day capacity for delivery on these mechanisms is. Student Affairs should seek to create a position/office for LGBTQ+ support that, similar to our ALANA Coordinator, collaborates with the Institute, uses their conceptual framework to inform work, but takes ownership of support delivery.

b) Recommendations

- i) Collaborative FYE Experience
 - 1) Leverage the work of the FYE Advisory Council to explore and establish learning outcomes for the first-year student experience
 - 2) Integrate GST 104 experiences and concepts into the New Student Orientation program
 - 3) Align current first year offerings in Student Affairs (New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Housing, Dean of Students, etc.) with the academic mission of FYE and the first-year seminar

- ii) Establish a centralized office or department to provide co-curricular programs
 - 1) Re-envision Campus Life/Student Involvement as a potential programmatic office
 - (a) Decrease the stress put on student organization resources to provide the bulk of these opportunities

- (b) Put an emphasis on filling current gaps in programs, such as weekends and late night alternative programming
 - (c) Consider a programmatic funding line that is supported institutionally, or contract with Student Association to steward a portion of the activities fee
- iii) Positioning of Civic Engagement and Community Service
 - 1) Connect service and community action to purpose
 - (a) The value proposition of community service is too tied to accumulation of hours and/or academic credits
 - 2) Leverage the Civic Engagement Coalition's efforts in this area to create a set of learning outcomes, and collaborative efforts from faculty, staff and students to achieve those outcomes.
 - (a) Develop a comprehensive Civic Engagement experience that helps students:
 - (i) Identify community problems
 - (ii) Learn to build capacity
 - (iii) Form partnerships with stakeholders
 - (iv) Formulate action plans
 - (v) Solve issues within their community
 - 3) Infuse and integrate the principles of civic engagement into student leadership development out of Campus Life
- iv) Centralized Support Services for LGBTQ+ Population
 - 1) Create a dedicated professional office to support and advise students that identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community

III. **Building Critical Infrastructure: Long Term Recommendations**

- a) Overview: SUNY Oswego has stood apart from peer and aspirational institutions in that we offer no dedicated student engagement spaces on campus. Academic facilities have, with good reason, garnered priority for capital updates. However, this has left students with limited, and limiting, spaces to pursue their co-curricular interests. Facilities such as Lee Hall and Swetman are vastly out of date when compared to other SUNY comprehensive institutions like Cortland and Brockport. The prioritization of Marano Campus Center for academic classes, administrative, and athletic events leaves students competing for limited opportunities to engage and program. Among all SUNY comprehensives, Oswego was the only institution to not provide a dedicated space for student engagement, such as a Student Center or Student Union. With that said, the pivot

to online learning during the pandemic also created an opportunity to engage students that did not have a physical presence on campus. As the online learning demographic emerges over the next few years, it will be critical for Student Affairs to advocate judiciously for targeted brick-and-mortar improvements, and virtual infrastructure to keep online learners engaged.

b) Recommendations

i) Dedicated Student Centered Spaces

- 1) Identify existing facilities and acreage that can be retrofitted and updated for student prioritized use
- 2) Examine the opportunity for capital expenditures on new construction
- 3) Address outdated facilities such as West Campus Residence Halls, Lee and Swetman in future capital plans

ii) Virtual Engagement

- 1) Identify the affinity points for remote/online learners and develop a strategy for engagement
- 2) Identify and invest in platforms, and tools that will allow for signature campus programs and events to be broadcast to a remote audience