

Well-being and Advocacy Working Group Findings and Proposals Fall 2021

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Summary

The Well-being and Advocacy Working Group (hereafter referred to as “the working group”) convened on 9/15/2021 and subsequently met five more times. Starting with a jamboard, the working group identified shared ideas about well-being; programs, services, resources and behaviors that support student well-being; and finally, identified the following proposals presented in this document. The working group declined to create a definition of well-being at this time. However, the working group identified the following dimensions as being inclusive of the themes of well-being provided by staff: financial, emotional, physical, environmental, career/occupational, social, spiritual and intellectual. These dimensions are comprehensible to students as they engage in developing a holistic approach to well-being. However, for the purposes of identifying a framework from which Student Affairs creates and promotes the well-being of students, the [Okanagan Charter](#) provides a sufficient and comprehensive schema that is well aligned with institutional values.

Process

The working group members began with a review of publications which provide conceptual frameworks for understanding and supporting student well-being. As noted, the working group members identified the symbols or associations of well-being at SUNY Oswego and themes were identified. Themes that were identified by the committee consisted of creating a comfortable environment, providing resources, health outcomes, community, belonging, connections, and developing purpose and meaning. The committee surveyed the Division and asked “From your perspective, how do you contribute to student well-being?” Themes identified through the staff survey were providing resources, listening, guidance, helping students develop and grow, welcoming students, mentoring students, and offering safe spaces. The identified themes supported the development of the interview questions for the audit process. The audit process began in October through interviews with unit heads within Student Affairs. The gaps identified through these interviews yielded the proposals.

Proposals and Recommendations

The working group identified multiple recommendations through the audit process, as well as through the working group members’ shared values and understanding of the experiences that have benefited students over the years. Please note that the pandemic has yielded the need for many of the recommendations to focus on creating access to activities that may have been suspended in accordance with local and federal health guidelines. The five categories (i.e. Infrastructure, Policy, Professional Interaction, Programming, and Communication) were identified in an effort to consolidate recommendations at a broader level. Below, the

recommendations are sorted by category, a brief description, rationale and examples in subcategories. A more comprehensive list resides in [the Recommendations table](#).

1. Infrastructure

a. Spaces and Environments

The working group proposes focusing on creating and updating spaces and office environments which are more welcoming, comfortable, accessible and promote socialization for students. Short-term solutions include painting student-facing offices in colors which have an intended [psychological effect](#) of either calming and soothing, or giving a sense of warmth and welcome.

Long-term solutions include creating and designating outdoor spaces for specific activities such as dining and recreation. [Studies](#) have identified the impact of nature on cognitive function and emotional regulation. Additional long-term considerations include creating or improving indoor recreational and dining facilities, and moving the Office of the Dean of Students out of the college administration building and into student-focused locations such as the campus center. Capital projects are both time and resource intensive. If these student-focused capital improvements cannot be prioritized, the working group recommends using a consultant or working group to study how to modify existing spaces with minimal financial cost.

b. People Resources

The working group identified intermediate and long-term recommendations of creating new positions that support student well-being. College staff have struggled to centralize or effectively collaborate in well-being because there is an absence of generalists with a focus on this area. The working group recommends a senior Student Affairs leadership position to support and provide oversight of well-being initiatives and units. Additionally, the direct support to students seeking mental health services, case management services and coaching services could be met through the creation of the following positions: embedded counselor positions and counseling liaisons to specific populations (e.g. residence-based, athletics, academic programs, etc...); a nutritionist to support the remediation of disordered eating, athletics, and weight management; generalist case managers to support various needs and housed within the Office of the Dean of Students and well-being coaches to support students in the development and maintenance of a holistic plan to create individualized healthy lifestyles.

c. Organizational structure

The working group identified value in considering a long-term recommendation of reorganizing Student Affairs with the new proposed positions. The intent is to create a structure to effectively coordinate the work of Counseling Services, Health Services, Recreation, health education and coaching, and a nutritionist. [See sample organizational chart](#).

2. Policy

a. Funding

The newly developed Department of Recreation lacks a dedicated state budget line. Given the relative instability of funding through Student Association, which currently funds several of the student employment positions necessary to provide activities and facility access, the working group recommends the establishment of a Recreation Fee to ensure stability of departmental funding. This would require the termination of the fitness center membership for students. By establishing a support fee, it cements the institutionalization of physical fitness and recreation activities for students.

b. Assessment standards and review processes

The working group identified some areas in which departmental policies lacked inclusive language and reasonable policy exceptions to create equitability and access to all students. This is most frequently exemplified in the use of binary gender language, policies that harm students with limited financial resources, and policies that fail to consider the needs of students with disabilities. The working group recommends the development of an assessment process and a standards review for each unit within Student Affairs, in an effort to reduce implicit marginalization of any student groups.

3. Professional Interaction

a. Assessment (climate survey data)

The working group identified a lack of shared expectations for professional interactions and student access to department resources. A short-term recommendation is to assess the methods in which students access department services and the departments' abilities to be satisfactorily and appropriately responsive to students' needs. In addition, the working group recommends accessing recent climate survey data (provided by Institutional Research and Assessment) to inform short-term priorities for service improvement within the division.

b. Training

Several training opportunities were identified as requiring short-term priority for staff participation. Training topic needs of professional staff, support staff and student employees and leaders span from anti-bias training to professional boundaries. The working group recommends dedicated funding to create training opportunities managed through the division's standing committees.

4. Programming

a. Outdoor programming

As noted in the Infrastructure section, the working group identified the value in creating outdoor spaces. While the weather in the region is often volatile, creating recreational programming that is seasonally congruent may further engage students in outdoor activities. The working group recommends the adoption of [Campus Nature Rx](#) to support this programming. Campus Nature Rx is a network of colleges in which "members conduct research and/or organize campus nature programs that support campus mental and physical health through inclusive and equitable nature engagement." Campus membership is free.

b. Well-being coursework

The working group identified several methods in which students may engage in extracurricular or curricular activities promoting well-being. Opportunities exist for student affairs professional staff to provide general education course instruction in well-being. There is value in adding to the diversity of curricular instruction through practitioners from within the division.

Additionally, the working group recommends studying the usefulness of creating a well-being living and learning community within one or all of the residence halls.

5. Communication and Messaging

a. Strategy

The working group identified a need for a division-wide communication and marketing plan for sharing resources. The purpose of this is to disseminate well-being information to students so that it is more easily navigable, as well as part of a cohesive effort across departments offering programming. Additionally, the working group proposes hosting a “well-being hub” on the college website to further streamline the aesthetic of the well-being information.

b. Access

The working group identified the need to create access to students who participate in their education in less “traditional” ways. Students who have jobs, commute to campus from a distance, attend classes through the Syracuse campus, and enroll through online instruction, are less likely to access SUNY Oswego educational programming and enjoyment of facilities that promote well-being. As such, the working group recommends building a process for recording events, to live-stream or archive, for students to access in a manner consistent with their needs.

Appendix

1. [JamBoard - Themes](#)
2. [Staff Survey](#)
3. [Interview Questions](#)
4. [Link to Unit Interview notes](#)
5. [Outcomes](#)
6. [Recommendations Spreadsheet](#)
7. [Recommendations - highlights](#) (table)

Note to external stakeholders: The work of this group, while comprehensive, was time-limited and specific to the SUNY Oswego Division of Student Affairs. The findings and proposal are therefore focused on Student Affairs. In no way does this document intend to disacknowledge the important collaborations and work being completed with and in other institutional units. We look forward to bringing the findings and recommendations to the college-wide Well-being Committee to identify shared opportunities moving forward.