reimagining

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Student Affairs
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Reimagining the student experience acknowledges that a student’s college experience is not a series of discrete activities in the classroom, out of the classroom, and in the community, but rather a continuous, integrated educational journey that provides students with the skills to succeed in a fast-paced, ever-changing, complex, and diverse global society.

Reimagining the student experience calls on student affairs professionals to consider a student’s cumulative collegiate experience, influenced by the student’s unique characteristics and contributions, and develop ways by which a student has the most productive, supported, and positive experience possible.

By reimagining the student experience, student affairs professionals will positively contribute to student persistence, time-to-degree, completion, and affinity for their alma mater.

I’m excited to share with you the programs, services, and activities that we will focus on to reimage the student experience at the University at Albany.

Go Great Danes!

Sincerely,

Michael N. Christakis, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs
The Division of Student Affairs creates an outstanding and inclusive student experience that promotes academic success, social engagement, personal growth, and resilience. The Division strives to advance the University’s commitment to excellence by preparing students to live, learn, and lead in an increasingly complex, diverse, and global society.

SUPPORTING OUR VISION OF PREPARING STUDENTS TO LIVE, LEARN, AND LEAD IN A DIVERSE AND GLOBAL SOCIETY

- Advocacy Center for Sexual Violence
- Campus Center Management
- Campus Recreation
- Career and Professional Development
- Community Standards
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- Disability Resource Center
- Intercultural Student Engagement
- New Student Programs
- Residential Life
- Student Affairs Communications and Marketing
- Student Affairs Technology
- Student CARE Services
- Student Health Services
- Student Learning and Assessment
- Student Involvement
College student development is influenced by a number of factors including involvement in co-curricular activities. Students who are involved in co-curricular activities are more satisfied with their college experience, are retained at higher rates, and have higher levels of academic achievement (Astin 1985).

Student Affairs will **reimagine** our students’ co-curricular experience by collaborating with institutional stakeholders to increase retention and contribute to our students’ academic success.
Students enrolled in high-impact programs that encourage faculty and student interactions have higher retention rates than those students who are not part of these organized programs. In addition, research has shown that students perform better academically when given the opportunity to be housed and enrolled in classes as a cohort.

Formalized residential learning environments house students in close proximity to one another and enroll them in some of the same classes. These practices result in the development of a greater sense of community, increased academic success, and provide increased opportunities for faculty interaction.

Student Affairs will reimagine how we foster student and faculty interaction. Working collaboratively with campus partners, we will create opportunities to engage faculty and students outside of the classroom. These engagement initiatives will include: Increasing the programmatic options offered in our Living-Learning Communities, programs aimed at first-year and transfer students, and targeted programs designed to enhance the experience of international, off-campus, and commuter students.
Numerous reports suggest that college students are displaying higher levels of distress but also lower levels of coping and adaptive skills than in prior years (Chew and Thompson 2014). A 2015 survey of UAlbany undergraduates reveals that 60 percent of respondents reported at least one significant marker of psychological distress. For this growing group of students, evidence-based screening and early interventions effect immediate change and hold the promise of modifying the trajectory of their college experience by decreasing negative consequences, improving academic outcomes and enhancing the resilience skills that prove to be a lifelong asset.

To enhance our reach to students, Student Affairs will *reimagine* strategies to grow and make accessible broad-based screening programs, evidence-based early intervention programs, and bystander intervention programs.
Research by Hunter (2010) indicates that sophomores may be at risk for attrition due to feelings of abandonment by the institution and have a lower sense of guidance. Some key factors for success in the second year include: living on campus, being engaged in co-curricular activities, involvement in undergraduate research, staying connected to campus community and opportunities, and seeking career counseling and advising services (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Hunter 2010).

Student Affairs will reimage existing initiatives by working collaboratively with Student Engagement and Institutional Research to address the potential factors that influence the retention of our second year population. We will develop program recommendations designed to increase faculty connections, provide career exploration, assist with selecting a major, and increase opportunities for leadership and service, all of which will provide a framework to increase retention of this cohort.
Focus on: Enhancing Leadership, Service, and Community Engagement Opportunities

Service learning and leadership development are high-impact practices that are proven to increase student retention, community engagement, and student learning. These programs increase student development, student satisfaction, and career readiness, while augmenting the visibility of the University in the broader community.

Student Affairs will reimagine the programs we develop to advance the University’s commitment to community engagement and preparing students for leadership in the 21st century. We will establish credit-bearing connections between out-of-classroom engagement and coursework, advance the community-based aspects of curricular and co-curricular teaching and learning, and develop a comprehensive leadership development program for students. In addition, Student Affairs will work with institutional partners to develop a community engagement plan that introduces students to regional leaders and gets them involved in community-based organizations and events, and promotes engagement in ongoing service experiences.
Student Affairs is committed to promoting a welcoming, inclusive campus environment for students. Research has long supported the idea that welcoming, inclusive, and diverse campus environments lead to greater retention and graduation rates for students. Graduates of institutions that are diverse and inclusive also demonstrate more advanced interpersonal skills, which are also positively correlated to higher employment and career advancement rates.

Student Affairs will reimagine opportunities for students to develop and expand their cultural competencies, clearly define and communicate the University’s values regarding diversity and inclusion, and encourage students to participate in programs such as study abroad and alternative spring break initiatives to develop global awareness and consciousness. The division will actively support programs that advocate increased support for members of our community who are from traditionally marginalized or under-represented groups. We will also ensure that all programs and services designed to orient students are inclusive and will collaborate with International Education and Global Strategy to more fully integrate international students into the life of the University.
Education remains the cornerstone of prevention of illness and promotion of healthy behaviors. Nationally, college students report stress, anxiety, and sleep difficulties as the top health factors that affect their academics (ACHA 2014). In addition, recent NIH publications point to alcohol as a key factor in accidental deaths, injury, assault and sexual assault, poor academic performance, and sexual risk-taking leading to increases in unplanned pregnancies, STI’s and other health consequences for college aged students (Merrill and Carey 2015).

Student Affairs will reimage how we educate and promote healthy lifestyles to our students. Through a team approach, we will implement the objectives of the Healthy Campus 2020 initiative, addressing priority health topics, and expanding the reach of existing health services will help to create sustained and healthier social and physical environments. We believe this approach will reduce the major health and wellness impediments that affect academic performance, productivity, and retention.
Student Affairs oversees a significant part of the campus infrastructure, including: 40 residence halls and three apartment complexes, which house almost 8,000 students; the campus center; and indoor and outdoor campus recreation spaces that have a direct impact on the student experience. Many facilities were built as part of the main campus and are now nearly 50 years old. We are concerned about the condition of these facilities, because the look and feel of a campus - as well as the physical condition and services provided in its facilities - influence prospective students as well as currently enrolled students.

Together with campus partners, Student Affairs will reimagine living learning environments, the Campus Center, and recreational spaces to enhance the student experience.
Student Affairs will examine opportunities across the division to increase efficiencies and streamline processes to optimize and grow resources, which is essential in advancing the mission of the division. An analysis of the budgeting and allocation model, commodity purchases, technology structure, and our current business practices will provide the data needed to realize efficiencies. In addition, we seek to grow resources by collaborating with University Development to create a culture of giving and connect philanthropy efforts to the University Foundation.

Over the next five years, Student Affairs will reimage business practices to develop clear, consistent, and collaborative approaches to doing business that will enhance operations and effectively utilize and grow resources.
FOCUS ON: **Assessing Student-Centered Services, Programs, and Activities**

To effectively respond to emerging student needs, Student Affairs will *reimagine* student services, programs, and activities to ensure that they meet the changing needs of our current students. We will assess current delivery methods, access, and offerings, while being mindful of changing student demographics, expanded academic programs, and modes of delivery. Student demographics are shifting to include significant growth in international and online students, and an evolving technological landscape - changes that require a comprehensive review of all service offerings.

We will explore new opportunities for service delivery using virtual, human, and physical methods, including what services we should provide outside of traditional hours, throughout the calendar year, and what may be offered utilizing technology or other delivery options without compromising the priority of engaging students on a personal level.
**FOCUS ON:** Strategically engaging stakeholders to cultivate relationships and increase institutional affinity and loyalty

Student Affairs will **reimagine** how we communicate with students and their families in order to develop and manage long-term, trusting relationships. We will engage them by telling our story, promoting institutional affinity, and enhancing connections. Utilizing practices early and often, we will enhance the student and family experience and engage all stakeholders in the life of the University.

Together with Communications and Marketing, Development, and the Alumni Association, Student Affairs will develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan to advance the division’s mission and augment the University’s ongoing efforts.
As students enter a global economy, there is a greater need for increased skill building, networking, and career education that begins in their first year and continues through graduation. As noted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the top skills employers seek in new hires include leadership, the ability to work in teams, written communication, and problem solving skills (“Skills/Qualities Employers Want” 2014).

Together with institutional partners, Student Affairs will reimagine an applied learning culture on campus, which will allow students the opportunity to “learn by doing.” Through these opportunities, students will engage in substantial experiences that will increase their transferrable skills. These skills will help lead to students’ success as they go to graduate school or enter into the workforce. These opportunities include undergraduate research, service learning, internships, and study abroad. We will collaborate with institutional partners to ensure that our students have the skills and abilities to succeed in a diverse, global society.
The 2014 ACHA-NCHA II responses from college students illustrate a clear association between health and a student’s academic performance. Nationwide college students report stress, anxiety, sleep difficulties and cold/flu as the top health factors that affect their academics (ACHA 2014). In addition, in the past 12 months, more than 62 percent of college students across the U.S. report feeling very sad, 54 percent report overwhelming anxiety, and 36 percent have felt too depressed to function, with seven percent of male students and eight percent of female students seriously considering suicide (ACHA 2014). Student Affairs has long worked to facilitate the treatment of students’ increasingly complex problems, improve the safety of the student and the community, and meet the challenging mental health care needs of our diverse student population.

Student Affairs will reimage access to student health care and the adoption of lifelong healthy behaviors and lifestyles among our students by working collaboratively with University partners to provide effective office-based interventions, ensure referrals to the appropriate provider/resources, and examine the use of technology to help facilitate access to services.
FOCUS ON: RECRUITING, DEVELOPING, AND RETAINING A TALENTED WORKFORCE

Student Affairs is proud of the diversity of UAlbany’s student population and strives to recruit, develop, and retain a workforce reflective of that diversity. A diverse and talented workforce creates greater opportunities for students and new professionals to seek and find mentors and role models. This has been shown to have a positive impact on the academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates of students, and the retention of employees.

Student Affairs will reimagine the employee experience by identifying ways to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of our professional, support staff, and student employees.
Description of Process

The planning process was intentionally designed as a unit-driven initiative in order to encourage each unit to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that will impact their unit within the next five years. Each unit was asked to identify problems, supported by evidence, to demonstrate the need for their priorities. With these concerns in mind, as well as the institutional and divisional guiding principles, each unit articulated goals and objectives, which were accompanied by a timeline, action steps, resources requests, and an assessment/evaluation plan. After planning items were submitted by the individual units, they were reviewed and approved by the Work Plan Steering Committee. The bottom-up format enabled individual units to have their own voice in the divisional planning process.

Guiding Principles

Institutional – President Jones’ “Four Stakes”

In September 2013, President Jones outlined four “stakes” in his inaugural address as the 19th president of the University at Albany:

1. Expanding the portfolio of degree-granting programs.
2. Recruiting more out-of-state and international students.
3. Broadening the role as a University engaged in the community.
4. Growing the resources to fulfill UAlbany’s ambition.

Divisional - Student Learning Domains

The Division of Student Affairs created four student learning domains based on institutional priorities as well as competencies outlines by the AAC&U.

- **Experiential Learning** - Students will develop transferable intellectual and practical skills to deal with complexity, diversity, and change.
- **Diversity & Inclusion** - Students will develop a broad knowledge of the social, civic, and economic challenges of a diverse and inequitable world.
- **Health & Resilience** - Students will develop lifelong strategies to optimize health behaviors and establish healthy coping skills.
- **Community Engagement** - Students will apply knowledge and skills for action in our communities and in real-world settings.
State University of New York (SUNY) System Core Values

**Student-Centeredness:**
The student is at the heart of all we do, whether we are focusing on the impact of volunteerism and applied learning on a student’s education, or student impact on campus and in community.

**Community Engagement:**
In our communities, learning goes both ways and forms of engagement range from community service and volunteerism to civic engagement, service-learning and participatory research.

**Diversity:**
Diversity enriches our lives and the educational experience. Drawing on the myriad life experiences and social locations of our students, we seek to engage in thoughtful, respectful, and meaningful ways with campus and wider communities.

**Integrity:**
When we demand of each other the highest standards of integrity and accountability, we create a collegial community that can confidently explore new frontiers, vigorously debate ideas, and learn from mistakes.

**Collaboration:**
Collaboration makes our expertise more powerful. When we acknowledge common goals and approach problems in a spirit of reciprocity and flexibility, we achieve far more than when we labor alone.

**Implementation Plan**
The AVPs will meet regularly with each unit leader to discuss their unit’s Work Plan progress. Unit leaders will also share updates in regularly held Leadership Team meetings, conducted by the Vice President. In addition, at the conclusion of each semester (December, May, and August), unit leaders will report on the Goals & Objectives that their unit focused on during that period. Using a provided template, the reports will highlight quantitative and qualitative evidence of progress.
Assessment Plan

Since 2008, the Division of Student Affairs has focused assessment initiatives on the measuring of student learning, collection and sharing of findings, and aligning program and department outcomes with divisional goals. Through the efforts of the Assessment Council, the Student Learning Project (SLP) became the centerpiece of creating a culture of assessment within the division. The Student Learning Project was established through a student-driven learning objective framework that integrated national (AAC&U), campus-wide (General Education), and student affairs best practices (CAS).

Now in its second phase, the Student Learning Project has helped the division realize student learning outcomes development. Based on public health literature on prevention strategies, learning objectives are created by targeting three different populations: universal, selective, and indicated.

Student Affair’s Student Learning and Assessment is also committed to the systematic gathering of information for the purposes of accountability, program improvement, and the enhancement of student learning. Student Affairs departments are asked to regularly collect data and share their findings with university stakeholders. With the development of the division’s Work Plan 2020, we have created an assessment and data framework that categorizes findings and outcomes. The framework is aligned with the three pillars of the Division of Student Affairs and the five SUNY Excels measures.

They include:

**Engagement:**
Measuring student involvement and factors that influence student engagement, to ensure a vibrant student body, rich in pride for the university and UAlbany traditions.

**Learning:**
Evaluating educational programs, services, and activities that enhance our students’ intellectual, social, cultural, professional and spiritual development.

**Success:**
Assessing activities and services, through success metrics, to safeguard a fostering and enriching student experience that develops and prepares students for life after college.


