A Message From the Vice President for Student Affairs

Colleagues and Friends:

I am pleased to present the Division of Student Affairs’ 2016 - 2017 Annual Report, which highlights the progress we have made toward the four targeted focus areas identified in our strategic plan, Reimagining the Student Experience.

Enhancing the Student Experience - We know that happy, healthy, engaged students earn better grades, remain at the University, and graduate sooner. We have stayed committed to providing students with an enriching experience outside the classroom that supports their academic endeavors.

Creating a Vibrant Campus Community - Student Affairs is committed to the idea that a welcoming, inclusive, and diverse campus environment leads to a strong campus community and University pride. Our programs and resources have grown this year to strengthen our community and support all students.

Creating Operational Excellence for Greater Success – In order for us to advance the mission of our division, it is important that we streamline processes and increase efficiencies. We have worked this year on increasing technological efficiencies and growing our culture of giving to enhance the student experience.

Providing Opportunities for Life-Long Success – We have worked with institutional partners to ensure that students have the opportunity to “learn by doing.” As a result, we have increased opportunities for students to build on essential skills and grow their professional network from the moment they arrive.

These focus areas reflect our singular purpose in Student Affairs: to make a positive difference in our students’ lives.

It’s a simple mantra - #MakeADifference - with tremendous potential to transform students’ lives through educational experiences, programs, and services throughout the University. We have made significant progress by supporting student success, providing students with resources they need to succeed, and encouraging students to pursue life and career success.

In the following pages, we outline the progress that we have made through our programs, all of which are grounded in collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to data-driven decision-making.

I’m proud of our work in leading efforts that make a positive difference in our students’ lives - and we continue to build on our success alongside all of our partners across UAlbany.

Go Great Danes!

Michael N. Christakis, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs
As we seek to enhance the student experience at UAlbany, we know that a key metric of our success is retention. That’s why we have focused on evidence-based interventions and best practices with the greatest promise to support student retention, in addition to committing increased resources toward measurement and assessment.

With the implementation of a holistic suite of collaborative programs, in Fall 2016 first-to-second year retention increased by three percentage points, to 84.1% - a six-year high.
The Student Experience

2016 saw a number of improvements and innovations in this area, including:

- An expanded Great Dane Welcome Survey, which allows us to gather data at the six-week point about the experience of our incoming students, as well as identifying those students who benefit from early alert outreach.

“I am a Big Dane by the name of Great DANEtopia. It was an amazing, fun, and exciting experience to see how diverse UAlbany is and how many different organizations there are on campus.”

Member, Class of 2020

“Great Dane Central was a great, fun place to hang out. It was a great place to interact with each other and with the UAlbany staff.”

Member, Class of 2017

“Driving Force Drives Commuter Engagement
At times, college can be challenging for commuter students, who often come to campus only for classes and do not stay for the activities and events that are critical to helping students put down roots on campus.

To get these students engaged (which helps keep them enrolled) the Office of Orientation and Transition Programs - in partnership with the Office of Student Engagement - reactivated the Driving Force commuter program. Beginning with Opening Convocation, where commuters meet and are seated together, this multifaceted resource offers events, information, and other opportunities tailored to commuters’ needs and schedules.

In addition to a monthly activity in the Commuter Lounge, in Fall 2016 we held the first-ever Commuter Appreciation Week featuring a breakfast, a game night, and a special gathering at the Great Dane Game Day.

Thanks to this new level of activity, we saw an increase in participation and a great result in the six-week survey.

We also built on the 2015 redesign of Freshman Orientation, introducing a new, two-part Transfer Orientation to provide more programming and separate transfer advisement sessions - and, for the first time, international students were integrated into Orientation with domestic students.

91% of commuter students said that they’re “excited about UAlbany.”

Improved facilities and physical spaces for students, including a more visible and comfortable Commuter Transfer Lounge and increased testing space for students needing accommodation through the Disability Resource Center.

The incorporation of predictive analytics through participation in the Student Success Collaborative (SSC). The Education Advisory Board’s (EAB) student success management system. In 2016, we moved our Student Success Team interface onto the EAB platform, helping to create a seamless integration with our larger data system.
Creating a Vibrant Campus Community

Research strongly supports the idea that a welcoming environment that cultivates both academic and social engagement moves the dial on student success. This strategic area of focus addresses the well-being of the whole student, with an emphasis on cultivating a welcoming, inclusive environment, along with activities that promote wellness, social engagement, academic success, and leadership development.

The annual Dance Marathon is one of many events that provide students with an opportunity to get involved and to #MakeADifference!
The Great Dane Welcome is at the center of this strategy, now providing six weeks of programming geared toward helping new and returning students make UAlbany their home away from home. Hosted by the Student Experience Committee, the Welcome includes welcome back and cornerstone events (campus-wide welcoming traditions like Opening Convocation and Great Dane Game Day), impact programs (themed social events in areas like wellness and diversity), and “passive” events such as organization fairs and giveaways that provide informational resources.

While efforts overall have been targeted mainly to first-to-second year retention, there is also a growing awareness that the “sophomore slump” requires additional focus on second-to-third year retention. The Second-Year Experience program was piloted in 2016 to keep sophomores from feeling a sudden “drop-off” in attention, creating activities that students could attend before, after, or during their first two years of college. A Welcome Back BBQ for second year students attracted 1,500 participants.

Based on data and observations in 2016, we know there is tremendous overlapping interest and need among both first and second-year students. In response to this learning, we’re in the process of creating Connect 2 UAlbany, a suite of programming targeted to both freshmen and sophomores.

Increase from 31 to 47 impact events in 2016; participation up 38% from 2015

Numerous reports suggest that college students are displaying higher levels of distress but lower levels of coping and adaptive skills than in prior years. Accessible, prompt, and effective psychological treatments assist students in resolving concerns, managing stressors, and developing resilience to succeed. In addition, alcohol and other drug use and associated risk behaviors are significant public health issues affecting college students. In 2016-2017, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provided clinical services to 1,653 students, an increase of 16% from 2015-2016. Of these, 375 CAPS clients were freshmen, representing an increase of 13% compared to the 332 freshmen seen in 2015-2016.

The Center for Leadership and Service was launched in 2016 as part of the UAlbany Advantage Program from the SUNY Investment and Performance Fund Grant, with the goals of increasing leadership development, applied learning, and service learning opportunities. Drawing on a strong partnership with the School of Education’s Department of Educational Policy and Leadership, the Center has developed a Leadership Minor designed to serve students from all majors with a unique community design. The Center hosts leadership programs ranging from one day workshops to year-long certificate programs - all grounded in the Social Change Model - an inclusive and holistic vision that cultivates leadership qualities in all students.

The Off-Campus Ambassadors Program won the top prize in the “Off-Campus, Commuter, Non-traditional, Graduate, and Professional” category. The program provides resources for off-campus students and works to enhance community relations. Student ambassadors act as liaisons between the University and community by hosting community events and attending neighborhood association meetings.

Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program won a Silver award in the category “Student Health, Wellness, and Counseling.” Middle Earth trains students to run hotlines, provide online peer assistance, and deliver education and career advisement services to help students meet educational goals and cope with emotional, social, and other life issues.

“Through this program, I was able to foster marketable skills that I still use today. When I enter a new position, I think of where leaders come from, the theories behind leadership, and how to be an ethical leader.”
Kayla James
2015 Emerging Student Leaders Program graduate

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Creating Operational Excellence
For Greater Success

Focusing on how we can more efficiently use our resources, streamline our processes, enhance access to services, and grow our resources is fundamental to our success and the overall student experience. This year, we placed an emphasis on increasing technological efficiencies that help to improve the student experience, including integrating the new student class registration process with the orientation intake form. We also continued to cultivate relationships with alumni to foster a community of giving and engagement through the establishment of the Student Affairs Advisory Board. This collaborative effort with University Development resulted in a 62% increase in the number of donors to the Student Life Fund.
In 2016 we launched a new data management system for the Disability Resource Center (DRC), moving the operation from an outdated paper system to secure software that is hosted off site with a readily available backup. This new utility will allow DRC to gain in efficiency and serve more students, providing a scheduling function that allows students to reserve time and space for testing. The software also has a powerful reporting utility that will help us learn more about the population that is being served by the DRC - allowing us to better address the needs of our students.

Another important technical advance in 2016 was a new orientation form that integrates the Course Request Form. This seemingly small change has had a significant impact on both our incoming students and Advisement Services. Advisors no longer have to reach out individually to students to acquire that information - and can make a proposed schedule based on the information in the form - enabling more informed and productive initial conversations between student and advisor. This innovation led to a 269% increase in course registration during the spring - so much so that Institutional Research asked if there was a problem with their reporting!

During 2016-2017, a purposeful plan of action for the Campus Center expansion came to fruition, providing a more attractive and vibrant environment with an emphasis on comfortable interpersonal engagement areas reflective of our institutional commitment to inclusive excellence. Students are set to enjoy this new space – along with expanded dining options – beginning in Fall 2017.

Creating LGBTQ+ UAlbany

Our LGBTQ+ App was developed in 2015 and launched in July 2016 as a one-stop shop for resources, organizations, and activities of interest to the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

The app, which was developed by interns in the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (GSRC), allows current and prospective students to navigate LGBTQ+ life on campus and connect with the LGBTQ+ community with 24 interactive components including an open chat line and access to the Queer Peer Advising Program.

One of the first apps of its kind, LGBTQ+ UAlbany also gained national exposure as an accepted presentation at NASPA’s national conference in 2017.

To increase private philanthropy targeted to the student experience, we launched the Student Affairs Advisory Board. Comprised of alumni and parents, the Board was recruited in 2016 and convened in January 2017. Board members make an annual fund giving commitment at the 1844 Society Level ($1,000+) to the Student Life Fund. In collaboration with University Development, Student Affairs also made significant progress in 2016 by promoting the Fund, adding a Student Life Fund mailer, enhancing its presence online, and increasing emphasis in the annual fund calling strategy. As a result of these efforts we saw significant increases in giving and in the number of donors.

NASPA Excellence Awards

Bronze Winner: The Office of Student Affairs Assessment and Planning won a Bronze award for its data collection and measurement process in the category “Administration, Assessment, IT, Fundraising, and Professional Development.” The new office was created over the summer to help collect data on retention and graduation rates, understand student behaviors, and measure student learning.
Providing Opportunities for Life-Long Success

In order for students to gain and develop the skills they need to be successful after graduating from the University at Albany, Student Affairs has been dedicated to ensuring that students have the opportunity to “learn by doing.” We have worked with institutional partners as well as employers to increase programs and resources that will help students build essential skills. In addition, we have focused on bringing UAlbany alumni back to campus to grow students’ professional network.

Twice a year, students connect with numerous employers to explore job opportunities and internships at the Job and Internship Fair.
The 2016-2017 academic year was successful for the Office of Career and Professional Development, with greater student engagement and enhanced offerings. As part of our focus on helping students expand career options and connecting them with successful alumni, in 2016 we expanded Danes in the City, adding a Spring Break program that included visits to Google, Edelman, and the set of the Warner Brothers television show Gotham.

These opportunities are identified and cultivated in collaboration with the UAlbany Alumni Association and University Development. As part of the program, each student has a half-day experience within an organization or company, providing real-world exposure to career paths and a powerful complement to what students learn in the classroom.

**Student Participants...**

“Simply the opportunity of meeting senior staff from these companies was amazing, but being surrounded by students who are just as driven to succeed as you are is great as well.”
Alberto Marriga

“I appreciated that we had a chance to meet with people in different departments, showcasing the diversity of career path options within a single company.”
Maksim Papenkov

“One of the best experiences I ever had with the University. I had the opportunity to shadow both the President and Vice President of Information and Resilience Risk Management at Deutsche Bank. Based on my experience and career path, they quizzed me and gave me major tips and resources that I can use to prepare for my full-time job and beyond.”
Ayoola Ogunwale

**Value Danes in the City!**

In 2016-2017 Student Affairs partnered with the UAlbany Alumni Association to increase exposure of the UAlbany Career Advisory Network (UCAN) to current students and their families. This program, sponsored by the Alumni Association, enables students to connect with successful alumni – fellow Great Danes who are familiar with the University and its academic programs and organizations. UCAN volunteers are essentially career advisors, eager to provide students with information and advice as they explore their own career path.

Our Peer Career Advising program (PCA) is a credit-bearing applied-learning opportunity where students can develop professional skills and build their own resumes through supporting their peers with basic career development needs. PCA grew in 2016 from 30 to 34 peer advisors - and we expect to bring in another 45 in 2017.

With a new presence in the Student Success Center, the program has greater reach to provide students with support on resumes, interviewing skills, and internship and job searching, among other career advising topics.

The Handshake career development platform also saw tremendous growth in 2016. UAlbany was an early adopter of this new network, which greatly expands connections between our students and prospective employers. There are currently 8,500 confirmed employers registered with Handshake and approved to post opportunities for our students.

26% increase in student use of UCAN over 2015-2016

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