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Final Report: Student Experience Working Group

Plymouth State University

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Student Experience Working Group Final Report

The student experience working group broke down into six subgroups to address the following six deliverables. Most faculty/staff joined two groups (assuming a low level of engagement across 8 weeks). Those assuming low engagement for four weeks joined one group.

The identified deliverables were as follows:

1. Facilitate three hours of engagement for faculty with new students through varied programming at Panther Days
2. Create plan for Student Development Series of three events/programs in Fall semester focusing on soft skills
3. Develop baseline survey for new students on expectations of Integrated Clusters experience
4. Develop a defined tiered system of engagement that unites faculty understanding of student engagement through shared language
5. Have a plan to launch in Fall to pilot increased communication/documentation through Student Success Collaborative
6. Develop plan to pilot faculty-res life partnership model in Fall 2017

Progress was made and deliverables met on all but one of the items above. Progress and deliverables are described below, with supplemental materials attached as appendixes.

Deliverable 1: Faculty Engagement in Panther Days (Subgroup: Laura Dykstra, Michael Brian, Mary Ann McGarry, Jenny Guyett)

The committee met regularly and brainstormed ways to get faculty involved in Panther Days in both structured and unstructured ways. The committee also met with faculty and staff planning Panther Days and contributed ideas/proposals for involving faculty. The committee felt strongly that while some faculty needed structured activities to contribute to (i.e. teaching a class or leading an activity) it was important for faculty to engage with students in informal ways as well, and we encouraged those planning cluster days to think of unstructured activities (meals, sporting events, etc.) that faculty could participate in. We also advocated for provision of childcare for faculty and staff during these activities in order to increase participation.

In addition, in coordination with Mark Fischler, faculty agreed to that offering First Class again this Fall would be beneficial to students. In order to maximize faculty involvement, faculty proposed that structured activities take place on Friday September 1st, when faculty are on contract, and thus will be more inclined to participate. Faculty proposed an Introduction to Clusters to follow First Class and designed an outline and mock syllabus including an informational powerpoint and guided activity, but due to concerns regarding faculty involvement, it was determined that a "Getting to Know Your Major" session would be preferable. Breaking down by major also allows students to get together in smaller groups, thus increasing their opportunities to form connections with other students and with faculty in the major.

Outcome: Ultimately, in terms of structured time, First Class, followed by a short break and then transition into Getting to Know Your Major will take up approximately 2.5 hours of structured faculty-

student time during Panther Days. In addition, there are unstructured activities that faculty can sign up for, including move-in days, participation in meals, etc., offering faculty a variety of opportunities to engage with students in a non-academic setting.

Deliverable 2: Student Development Series (Laura Dykstra, Robin Hausheer, Greg Dumont, Kelly Swindlehurst)

The committee met regularly and began by identifying the purpose of the Student Development Series – namely to focus on “soft skills” that students will need to be successful in college and beyond. That led us into thinking about practical skills, planning for the future, etc., and shifted us into the working model of the Student Development Series we landed on. Faculty proposed a three event series (see attached *Appendix I*) including one event on financial literacy, challenges facing first year students, and a student panel featuring upperclassmen and alumni discussing things they wish they had known as first year students. The overall goal of this series is to engage students in “thinking forward” (essentially getting them to think about what they can do now to be successful in the future.

Connections were made with Denise Hutchins and her Event Marketing class, and with Matt Curtis and his office to discuss how best to work collaboratively and combine resources. Matt suggested drawing in Residential Life staff, and after being contacted by the Student Senate, I suggested potentially drawing them into this process as well.

Outcome: A proposal (*Appendix I*) has been developed featuring three workshops:

Workshop 1: You mean I have to pay it back?! Understanding your finances and paying for your education

Workshop 2: Learning through improve: An exploration of challenges

Workshop 3: “What I wish I knew then” - A student panel

The committee has partnered with Denise Hutchins and her Event Marketing class particularly for the last event, and with Matt Curtis for the series. We are also working to draw in the Student Senate.

Deliverable 3: New Student Survey (Laura Dykstra, Mary Ann McGarry, Chris Chabot, Ryan Donathan)

The committee met regularly and began by identifying the purpose of the student survey. It was determined that we wanted the survey to be able to both capture preliminary information regarding what students (think they) know about clusters, and to inform future efforts to evaluate how students view the cluster model. We also wanted the survey to be short, easy to complete, and approachable to students. We determined that the best avenue for completion would be an online survey that they could quickly complete on a smartphone, laptop, or tablet. We also determined that in order to maximize response rates, we would like to a) administer the survey during Panther Days, and b) limit the survey to only a few minutes.

Through a series of meetings, faculty and staff identified several concepts they were interested in measuring including: a) how much students had heard about clusters, b) where they had gotten their information, c) what impact, if any, the cluster model had on their decision to attend PSU, and d) what they view as potential benefits and drawbacks of clusters. After some debate, it was determined to allow the final concept to be open-ended and mine the data afterward for common themes to inform future questions.

Outcome: A brief 3 minute, 10 question survey has been developed to administer to incoming students. A paper draft of the survey can be viewed in *Appendix II*. The survey has been entered into Qualtrics so that it can be completed electronically.

Deliverable 4: Tiered Model of Student Engagement (Laura Dykstra, Michael Brian, Chris Chabot, Robin Hausheer, Greg Dumont)

The committee met regularly and began by developing a framework of a tiered system of skill building and engagement. The committee considered relative skills of students at different levels of study, expected engagement of students at different levels of study, the necessity of building on previously developed skills, and the importance of setting reasonable and realistic expectations of student work. The committee also gave thought to the role of graduate students both as students and as TAs or mentors for undergraduate students.

In developing the tiered model, the committee considered both strategic outcomes for what each tier is designed to accomplish and tactical approaches to how tiers may meet these goals. Eventually, a model was developed identifying 4 tiers: 1st Year/Introductory, 2nd Year/Intermediate, Advanced Projects, and Capstones. This model describes tiers and levels of skill building for both graduate and undergraduate students.

Outcome: A 4-tiered model has been designed. Figures were made to illustrate the model, and a narrative developed to explain it. The full model can be viewed in *Appendix III*. The committee welcomes feedback.

Deliverable 5: Academic Affairs/Student Affairs Communication (Laura Dykstra, Mary Lena Sevigny, Jeff Furlone, Corey Hoyt, Ryan Donathan)

This committee did not meet. The intention of the work was to add to an existing conversation around increasing communication between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs relating to students, and particularly making use of the Student Success software to accomplish this. We had aimed to a) identify items that need to be communicated and b) explore ways to use our existing technology to increase the communication. However, because this conversation was ongoing, we did not want to duplicate existing efforts and thus asked staff members already involved in the process (Jeff and Mary Lena) to let us know how best to contribute. Initial emails went unanswered, and eventually, the response was that no input was needed.

Outcome: In an effort to neither duplicate efforts nor disrupt existing efforts by butting in, the committee did not contribute to the efforts to increase communication between Student Affairs and

Academic Affairs. However, it is my understanding that there is a plan in place to use the Student Success Collaborative software in the Fall to facilitate communication of some type.

Deliverable 6: Faculty-Res Life Partnership (Laura Dykstra, Mark Fischler)

Plans had begun for a partnership between faculty and residential life staff prior to Summer. These plans continued over Summer, going through several iterations before settling on a “Residential Scholars Program.” The purpose of the Residential Scholars program is to better integrate Academic Affairs and Student Affairs by getting faculty involved with students outside the classroom. A natural place for this to occur, especially with first year students was in Residence Halls.

Mark’s office has recruited five full-time faculty members (and hopes to recruit a few more) to pilot the Residential Scholars program in the Fall. Faculty have been assigned to a Residence Hall and have been connected with the Residence Director of that hall to coordinate efforts. Faculty are being encouraged to participate in (or even help to plan) programming, form connections with students outside the classroom by eating with them, interacting with them in the dorms, participating in move-in days, and more. There is also hope that as Residential Scholars become more involved in Residence Life, they will be able to draw in additional faculty for programs, etc.

Outcome: A pilot program consisting of at least five Residential Scholars in three traditional Residence Halls (but hopefully up to eight Residential Scholars in four traditional Residence Halls) will run in the Fall of 2017. The current Residential Scholars include Laura Dykstra and Annette Holba (Grafton), Barbara Lopez-Mayhew and Stephanie Halter (Pemi) and Kate Elvey (Blair). Residential Scholars are encouraged to spend at least two hours per week with residents engaging in conversation, participating in programs, holding office hours in the Residence Halls, etc.

Conclusion

The Student Experience Working Group has been hard at work this Summer and has used their time productively to benefit students. We are lucky to have benefitted from their leadership and service this Summer.

APPENDIX I:

A Proposal for a Student Development Series at Plymouth State University

One of the recent initiatives on campus is the “drive for 85,” focusing on the need to increase retention, particularly among our first-year students. We know that one of the factors that increases retention is student connection with the campus and student engagement within the campus and larger community (need a citation here).

To address that goal, we propose a 3 workshop series focusing on skills and dispositions students need to be successful and productive in communities. The series has the following learning goals:

- Increase engagement for students on campus
- Improve financial literacy, specifically in regards to budgeting and debt
- Improve self-awareness, particularly in regards to how students are spending their time

While all events will be open to all students, the target audience for this series is first-year students.

Resources needed:

- Advertising and marketing support to announce and promote the series
- Funds for materials (to print passports, advertising materials)
- Funds for food and activities at the winter carnival (or some other type of incentive?)

Workshop 1: You mean I have to pay it back?! Understanding Your Finances and Paying for Your Education

Through an interactive, one-hour presentation with activities students will learn about how to make a budget and balance their finances. They will also learn about the basics of student loans (including the difference between subsidized and unsubsidized loans) and managing debt. During this workshop, students will:

- Learn about the different types of loans they might have
- Learn about budgeting and practice making a budget
- Explore what the impact of their student loans will be throughout their four years
- Learn about the student loan repayment terms (grace period, different repayment plans, opportunities for loan forgiveness, etc.)

As part of our effort to encourage students to attend, a pizza dinner will be offered during the workshop (Greg had mentioned the idea of a dinner, so I threw this in here, but feel free to change it).

Workshop 2: Learning through Improv: An exploration of Challenges

Through the use of improv skits performed by faculty and members of PSU’s Improv Group, students will be exposed to a variety of situations and circumstances they might see in college. Improv skits will focus on: underage drinking, of-age students buying alcohol for underage students, drug use and destructive behaviors.

During this workshop, students will:

- Have the opportunity to watch role plays
- Have the opportunity to reflect on what they are seeing

- Engage in discussions with fellow students and faculty members about different ways to respond to challenging situations

Workshop 3: "What I wish I knew then" Student Panel (w/ Denise Hutchins)

Students will have the opportunity to listen to a student panel discussing things they wish they had known when they were first-year students. The panel will be comprised of upper class students who have had some type of struggle (academic, behavioral, financial) during their first several years at PSU. Upper class students will talk to first years (and others) about mistakes they have made and things they have learned along the way.

This student panel will give first-year (and other) students the opportunity to learn directly from their peers.

During this panel, students will:

- Have the opportunity to hear from upper class students who have struggled in college as well as those who excelled (disparate student experience and outcomes - job opportunities)
- Learn about ways to prevent mistakes and/or recover from challenging situations
- Connect with other college students

Celebration ? (This is simply one idea to incentivize... something else could be substituted. Perhaps turn it into a contest where the [OA group, residence hall, whatever] with the greatest attendance gets a prize of some kind, etc.)

The purpose of this carnival is to celebrate the completion of fall semester courses as well as the end of the student development series. We propose a 2 hour event in the ALLWell North Center that includes:

- Food for students: perhaps instead of offering dinner in the dining hall, we do an indoor cookout for all students. Additionally, we would hope to offer "fun" snacks (i.e. cotton candy, popcorn, nachos, a chocolate fountain)

During this experience, students will:

- Have the opportunity to connect with one another and build relationships
- Connect with faculty and staff
- Have a safe and fun way to celebrate the end of classes for fall semester

APPENDIX II:

STUDENT SURVEY – DRAFT JULY 2017

- 1) Before starting orientation, how much had you heard about integrated clusters at Plymouth State University?

1	2	3	4
A lot	Some	Very little	Nothing at all

Some students have attended various information sessions during the course of their admissions process, or after being admitted to the University.

- 2) Did you attend a prospective student day in the Fall of last year?

1	No
2	Yes

- 3) Did you attend an accepted student day in March or April of 2017?

3	No
4	Yes

- 4) Did you attend new student orientation in June of 2017?

5	No
6	Yes

- 5) Before starting orientation, how much had you learned about integrated clusters at Plymouth State University...

	A lot	Some	Very little	Nothing at all
from presentations during prospective student days in the Fall...	1	2	3	4
from recruiters and admissions counselors...	1	2	3	4
from your own independent research online...	1	2	3	4
from other faculty/staff I spoke with at the university....	1	2	3	4
from presentations during accepted student days in March/April...	1	2	3	4
from other sources....	1	2	3	4

- 6) Which of the following statements best describes the impact, if any, learning about clusters had on your desire to attend Plymouth State University (PSU)?

a. I already knew I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters had no effect on my decision.

- b. I already knew I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters made me even more excited about attending.
- c. I already knew I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters made me question my decision.
- d. I was unsure if I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters helped convince me to attend.
- e. I was unsure if I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters made me even more doubtful that PSU was the best fit for me.
- f. I did not think I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters helped convince me to attend.
- g. I did not think I wanted to attend PSU before learning about clusters, and clusters made me even more doubtful that PSU was the best fit for me.
- h. I did not know anything about clusters before enrolling at PSU, so clusters had no bearing on my decision.

7) What do you see as the biggest potential benefit of clusters? (What, if anything, makes you the most excited about this model?) – OPEN ENDED

8) What do you see as the biggest potential drawback of clusters? (What, if anything, makes you the most worried about this model?) – OPEN ENDED

9) Have you declared a major at PSU?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

10) If so, what is your major? – OPEN ENDED

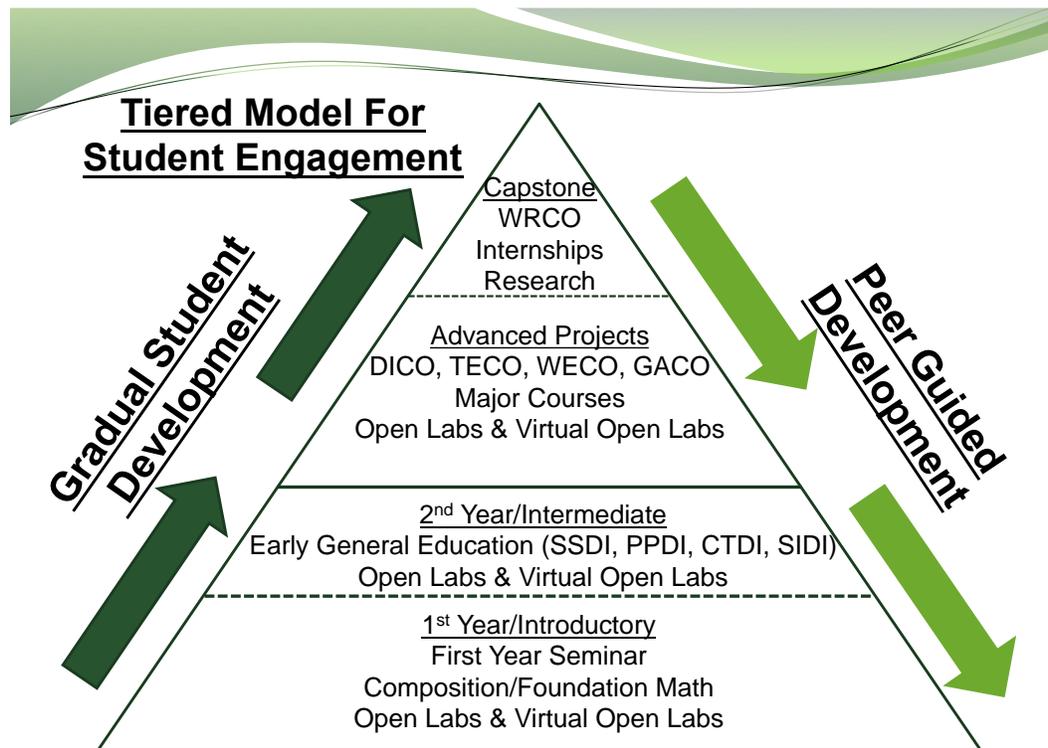
APPENDIX III:

Tiered Model for Student Engagement

Sub-Committee: Robin Hausheer, Laura Dykstra, Gregory Dumont, Christopher Chabot & Michael Brian

Introduction:

The following Tiered Level Student Engagement model defines each level of student engagement for integrated cluster projects. The model's purpose is to provide guidance for Plymouth State University faculty, staff, and students, as well as project partners and stakeholders during the process of integrated cluster project development and implementation. Please note, this model allows for flexibility in designing projects to meet the individual needs of students and programs.

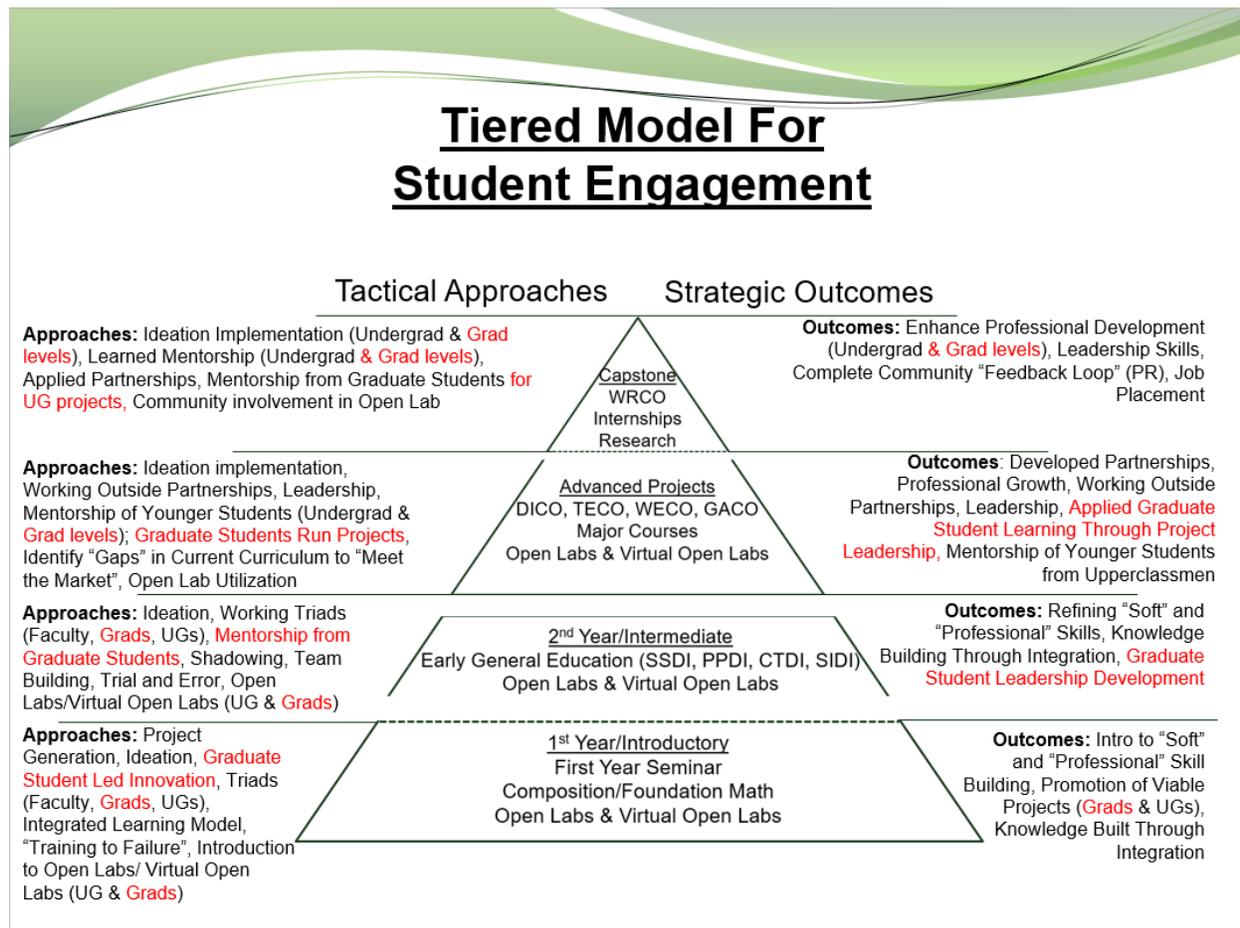


Tiered Model Explanation:

Each tier has the potential to build upon lower-level tiers, although faculty, students and staff may find that specific projects may be developed at a higher-level tier (e.g. internship experiences in education programs). Gradual student development will naturally evolve as students' knowledge and skills increase, thus allowing students and their projects to "advance" to the next tier. Peer guided development is a "trickle-down" effect involving upper classman (3rd and 4th year undergraduate

students) and graduate students providing guidance based on their more advanced skill development and experiences to 1st and 2nd year undergraduate students. All students progressing through the Tiered Model for Student Engagement have the potential to provide peer guidance.

Tactical Approaches and Strategic Outcomes:



1st Year/Introductory: Early cluster projects embedded into early curriculum courses will utilize approaches to generate new projects and spark innovation. Upper level graduate students will be challenged to lead projects and collaborate with undergraduate students to assist in driving forward cluster projects. Projects should introduce newer students to "Open Laboratories" and "Virtual Open Laboratories". Outcomes in the "Introductory" block should build basic professional skills and knowledge through integration across disciplines.

2nd Year/Intermediate: Intermediate cluster projects embedded in early general education courses (e.g. Self and Society, Past and Present, Creative Thought) should continue to utilize approaches to generate and refine cluster projects. Building onto "Introductory" engagements, cluster projects should focus on outcomes that continue to build professional and leadership skills (Graduate and Undergraduate).

Advanced Projects: Advance projects should engage students by having them implement projects. They will be challenged to utilize their skills and knowledge to lead projects with the help of faculty members and mentorship from graduate students. Outcomes should focus on refining professional skills, while continuing to build knowledge. Projects that span across “Introductory” and/or “Intermediate” curriculum courses should encourage mentorship/leadership from upper-class students. This will continue to help us build a better sense of community across disciplines and grade levels.

Capstone: Capstone projects should engage students in ideation implementation. Students should be engaged with external partnerships and internships. Graduate and upper-class undergraduate students will be engaged by becoming leaders of cluster projects under the advisement of faculty members. Capstone outcomes will enhance professional development through leadership and self-guidance. These experiences will potentially provide opportunities for job placement.