The Integrated Student Experience at Lafayette College - Creating Connected Communities

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Executive Summary

The Presidential Task Force on the Integrated Student Experience was established in November 2013 with the primary goal of recommending approaches that provide the integration of students' academic, social, and personal experiences throughout their time at the College. The Task Force focused on three categories: residence life; academic advising and career preparation; and, co- and extra-curricular activities to extend learning experiences beyond the classroom, while keeping in mind that the recommendations should be inclusive and integrated.

The charge provided to the Task Force was a continuation of the work accomplished by the Laf360 Initiative in Spring 2013 with the expectation of providing additional concrete recommendations. After reviewing the ideas outlined in the summary from the Laf360 initiative between November and December in 2013, the Task Force determined that re-envisioning the residential structure could serve as the central platform on which to provide a more holistic, integrated experience. The members of the Task Force met for ninety minutes weekly from early February to mid-April in the spring semester of 2014, discussed a range of topics related to the current policies and environment of the College, consulted with faculty and staff colleagues who have experiences working with students outside of formal academic settings, and developed consensus on a modest set of recommendations. The proposed recommendations were presented in four separate meetings between late March and early April 2014 (two open meetings for faculty and staff, one open meeting for students, and one meeting for student leaders) to receive public feedback before making final recommendations.

What follows is a summary of recommendations by this Task Force that includes the suggestions of the community at large.

- Create a coherent and comprehensive residential program to connect academic programs, residence life, and career services.
- Enhance housing and dining services to provide students with a variety of living/learning options that support and improve their academic experience while strengthening the sense of campus community.
- Establish a comprehensive advising system, consisting of faculty, professional staff, peer mentors, and career services, to support the demands of a diversified student body.
- Build a coalition of academic faculty and student affairs professionals to provide intentional opportunities for rich learning experiences for students in residence.
- Develop residential social spaces that allow strong residential communities to form and flourish.

Introduction

Since the 1990's, the boom of personal computing, the internet, mobile devices, etc. has made dramatic changes to people's daily lives, including college education and its environment. Today college students use computers to make complex designs possible, to discover a wealth of information at their fingertips, and to communicate with their families and friends wherever they want with their mobile devices. Technology brings convenience to human society. At the same time, it also introduces new challenges for people to solve. One example is the challenge posed by the introduction of online college educations (allowing flexible schedule with low or no cost) to the expensive residential colleges. (Baldwin, W., 2013.) How will residential colleges be able to survive the competition of online college educations?

To answer this question, we argue that residential colleges such as Lafayette are particularly well-situated to meeting several valuable goals: (1) preparing students with skills that exceed the expectations of employers in a competitive job market; (2) preparing students to be community leaders and global citizens; (3) fostering personal growth toward the end of leading a productive and satisfying life.

Today's world calls for an interdisciplinary focus. Many challenges, such as product development, corporate management, health care, environmental problems, and political conflicts are not completely solvable unless a team of people from various disciplines can work together collaboratively. An academic world is an essential place to build bridges across the intellectual spectrum, to provide specialized knowledge, and to explore how these perspectives can be integrated to create solutions. A residential campus establishes a community where collaborative skills can be fostered.

An essential ingredient in any successful cooperative project is "social capital" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 2000). Social capital is created by networks of individuals who trust one another, engage in reciprocity, share information, and feel a sense of solidarity. "Bridging" social capital is particularly valuable. As opposed to "bonding" social capital within homogeneous groups, "bridging" social capital is associated with networks that "are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages" (Putnam 22).[1] Bridging social capital not only will equip our students with social skills and connections that will advantage them in our diverse society but also will provide a more equitable distribution of social resources to all students—no matter their social identities.

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[1]Bonding social capital may occur more easily in many situations and often brings with it a stronger sense of solidarity, but it also tends to be accompanied by considerable problems, including social exclusion, prejudice, and sometimes even corruption.

With this in mind, many of the task force recommendations are oriented toward building bridging capital on campus.

Finally, the success of a cooperative project requires not only a team of people with good skills in their respective fields and cooperative sensibilities but also individuals with strong leadership skills to steer the project from the beginning to the end. A residential campus serves as an incubator to foster the refinement of these skills in a way that celebrates success and provides a relatively safe place to learn from failures. A residential college that can promote interdisciplinary teamwork and provide leadership-training opportunities to prepare students with skills needed for successful careers as well as productive involvement in the broader community is key to maintaining the value of a residential college education.

In sum, the College, aware of the existing challenges and new opportunities in higher education, must refocus its attention on creating a healthy, intellectually stimulating, and socially rich environment that fosters academic, personal, and social growth and maturation to prepare students for career success, democratic citizenship, personal satisfaction, and lifelong affinity to the College. We argue that the College can use residential facilities for a well-designed program that can support classroom instruction and career development, provide opportunities for students to acquire and practice leadership skills, and establish a strong sense of community among a diverse student body.

The Platform to Integrate the Student Experience

To integrate the student experience, it is crucial to have a **central** platform to connect the components of each student's daily life with the purpose of increasing academic success, enhancing a sense of individual fulfillment, and promoting active participation in a community that values achievement and service. Numerous studies (Altschuler & Kramnick, 1999; Pascarella, E.T., Terenzini, 1994) have shown that strengthening the residential platform is critically important for the implementation of an integrated vision for a renewed student culture. By housing students in clusters along with creating thoughtfully designed activities, an intentional residential platform can be established to facilitate more targeted programming and support.

Enhancing college housing facilities with the purpose of integrating students' college experiences has been implemented by many colleges and universities nationwide. For example, the Minerva program at Union College blends academic, social and residential interests. Trinity College's new living/learning house system, designed to enhance the integration of social and intellectual life throughout the college community, will open its door to first-year students in fall 2014. At Bates College, the goal of the residence life program is to foster residential communities that support students' personal growth through critical thinking and social and intellectual engagement beyond the classroom. Dickinson College is searching for plans to make the boundaries between residential and academic life more permeable, improve advising, and have faculty spend quality time with students at meals, etc.

The Lafayette residential environment should provide opportunities for students to pursue specific interests and organize their own learning through **connected communities**. Our students are increasingly drawn towards opportunities to connect their classroom experience, or their intellectual interests more generally, with their out-of-class activities and their living arrangements. Students today crave a sense of belonging, and our campus life system should strive to give every student that sense of being part of a known community. Our residential life system should foster the development of a range of communities that provide a platform for intellectual engagement, friendship, and bonding.

What could potentially make the program of integrating students' experiences at Lafayette College unique among its peer institutions would be to establish a curriculum-based community program focusing on the value of community-based success, identified through the survey conducted by Laf360 in spring 2013. This program should include components that encourage students to enhance their skills of personal management, recognize and appreciate a diversified community, identify their personal strengths and

talents, acquire the knowledge and skills to be future leaders, and work as a team to achieve their common interests.

The diagram of the residential platform with the supported programs illustrated in Figure 1 is the future Lafayette community proposed by this task force.
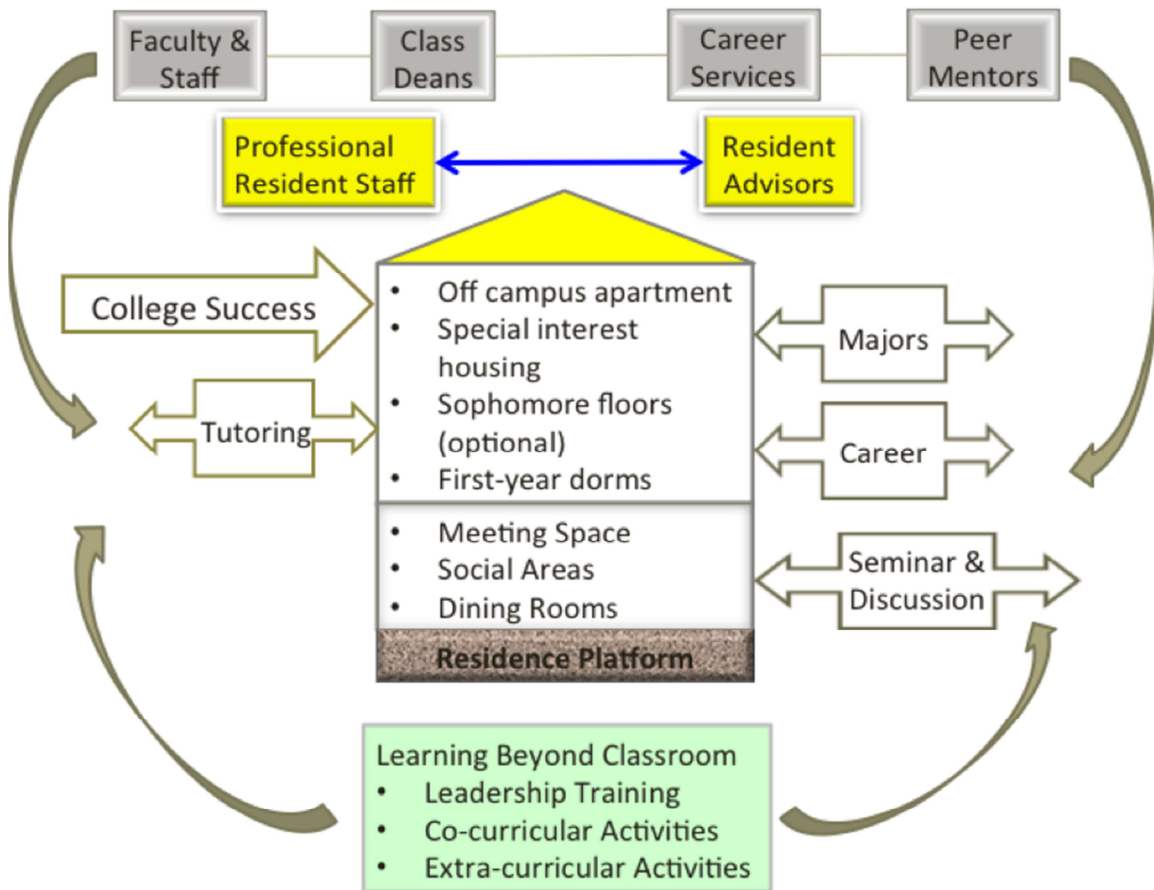

Figure 1, the platform to integrate the whole student experience – academic, social, and personal.

Residence Halls are the center of this proposed structure, consisting of different housing structures that facilitate the establishment of class identity, strengthen living-learning communities, and encourage intercultural and personal development. Each residential building should have at least one common area with sufficient space to host meetings, seminars, group discussions, and social activities with the goal of establishing close-knit communities in residential buildings. All the residential buildings would be supervised by professional residence life staff. These professional residence life staff would also supervise student staff such as head residents (HRs), resident advisors (RAs), and Living-Learning liaisons who would be charged with planning and coordinating various activities for the community-based curriculum such as community formation and

awareness discussions, college readiness and success seminars, tutoring, career development workshops, and leadership training.

The **community curriculum (PARD Program)** would be considered a co-curricular program that provides a better connection between academic programs, campus life, and career services and would extend over four years rather than being limited to the traditional four-day Orientation period. Each student would move throughout the PARD Program, beginning with PARD101 in their first-year and ending with PARD 401 in their senior year. Students would live in a variety of communities during their time here, creating multiple points of connection with a wide range of fellow students. Upon entry to the college, first-year students would be organized into teams of 25-35 for housing purposes and orientation, and these teams would continue to form the basis for meetings, activities, programs, and social events throughout a student's time at Lafayette. Each student team would have a name and be encouraged to create social media accounts as a way to communicate and plan events. An important goal of this system would be to create an enduring sense of connection and affiliations with one's team as well as the class as a whole.

The PARD Program would be the platform for programs involving a wide range of topics such as alcohol and sexual assault and harassment education, general academic advising, career counseling, pre-professional advising, stress management, valuing and understanding diverse experiences and perspectives, study skills and training on a variety of topics. In addition, these programs would have a social focus that included participation in intramural events as well as work on team projects where the group is able to solve problems as a cohesive unit. These programs would be mandatory, regularly scheduled, monthly meetings which would include peer-led workshops, panels, and events. All first-year students would attend the same program (in teams, groups of teams, and occasionally as a full class), perhaps on the same day each month if it is feasible. On another evening all sophomores would meet, as would juniors and seniors. While first-year students would be learning the skills needed to live responsibly in these new communities, sophomores would be receiving preparation for leadership roles, and junior and senior meetings would focus on life skills, graduate and professional schools, and career preparation. These monthly class meetings would provide an opportunity for shared programming but also be the basis for class socialization, parties, and fun traditions that would aid in cementing class bonds over a student's entire career at Lafayette.

First-year students would live together in a first-year village formed by the residence halls clustered around Marquis Dining Hall, which after some renovation could be the center of dining-based programs as well as a hub for academic and social activities. The village would offer the opportunity for focused events and programs that

serve the needs of new students such as time management and study skills training, alcohol education, advising regarding scholarships and fellowships, and some broad discussions regarding goal setting. Most importantly, this village would allow for focused attention on social opportunities for first-year students providing the opportunity for them to create their own safe fun in a variety of social spaces.

An important piece of the first-year **PARD101** program would be the assignment of junior mentors (**PARDners**) to the first-year students. These PARDners would serve as peer advisors/mentors and would begin communication with the first-year students during the summer before their first year at Lafayette. PARDners would be available to offer support, advice, general advising and mentorship, ensuring contact with upper level students in addition to the contact provided through classes, college activities, sports, and the like. PARDners would be assigned to the first-year teams and be available to work with the students for the duration of their first year, meeting in groups as well as on an individual basis.

Sophomores would have the opportunity to choose from a variety of housing options whether it be larger residence halls, living learning communities (i.e. Grossman and McKelvy), special interest floors, or Greek houses. For those who desire to live in larger residence halls, small groups of friends could choose to live together in a block of rooms in one particular section of a residence hall. The College might also encourage the addition of a wider variety of special interest floors, perhaps for students involved in Tech Clinic, the IDEAL center, or other academic and social communities. Having sophomores eat in the dining halls will also increase the sense of community in the class as they will be able to plan events around shared meals without incurring additional expense (as a result of the newly instituted meal plan requirements). During the sophomore year, the **PARD201** program would focus on choosing a major, considering options for study abroad, working on resumes and investigating internship and externship opportunities, partnering with faculty around research, and honing leadership skills as they prepare to take on the roles of student leaders.

Junior year is a time when many students go abroad, some assume leadership roles in campus organizations, and others become restless within the campus environment. **Seniors** tend to be preoccupied with post-graduate preparations such as career and graduate/professional school planning. Juniors and seniors would have a number of options for more independent living such as living learning communities, residence hall singles and suites, and off campus housing. Ideally, upper level students would all be accommodated in housing that suits their need for a greater level of independence as they prepare to transition out of Lafayette. **PARD 301 and 401** would focus on career preparation, life skills, independent living, and would encourage juniors and seniors to consider their role in the community as they transition to the post-graduate world. These

programs could include interim courses on financial management, career networking, cooking, health, and stress management.

The goal of the system described above is to provide a series of connected communities for all students. The close-knit bonds of the orientation teams could serve as the building blocks for future points of socialization/friendship, and serve as a safe community for those students who require more time to bond with their peers. Additionally, the varied living opportunities of upper- level students would allow for the reinforcement of new bonds based on mutual interests, both academic and social in nature. Students would benefit from the opportunity to develop friendships outside their usual comfort zone with the wide range of diverse and talented students who make up a single class. Students would also learn valuable lessons in leadership and community-building by being given the opportunities to form and run their own living groups.

In the following sections, the Task Force provides recommendations on residence life, academic advising, learning beyond classrooms, faculty involvement, and establishing spaces for community development to support the integration of the student experience.

Residence Life Recommendations

(1) Establish the first-year residences with programs targeting first-year needs and building class identity.
A survey conducted by the Residential Communities Subcommittee of Laf360 also suggested that students who stayed with the same class had more positive first-year experiences. Most first-year students this year stay together or are grouped within the same class in buildings. The comments from RAs have been more positive than before.

(2) Create a structure to allow for sophomore floor(s) or dorms as an option if students are interested.
This class-year based housing provides opportunities to establish/consolidate existing class-year programs that focus on 2nd year specific needs, such as advising, academic support, time management, value clarification, choosing a major, internships, study abroad, etc. These programs can be held in the class-year based housing and will be open to the entire class regardless of residency. The class-year based housing can host activities to continuously strengthen class identity.

(3) Increase the number of professional resident staff; provide direct supervision of RAs by professional staff; re-evaluate number, location, and duties of Head-Resident position.
When compared to similar departments at similar-sized peer colleges, Lafayette College's Residence Life Office has fewer people working in it, limiting the quantity and quality of additional programming we recommend here. Having additional staff working in Residence Life would create the possibility of additional programming in these Residential Communities. To integrate students' experiences and to coordinate the programs of the community-based curriculum, the professional resident staff members play a key role in the success of the programs proposed in this report. The Residence Life Office should conduct a survey among Lafayette's peer institutions to determine the appropriate number of professional residential staff members that are needed to meet these recommendations and to create a proposal for additional staff to present to College administrators.

By increasing numbers of professional residential staff, residence life will be better equipped to support this new curriculum and the student staff associated with these communities. Head-resident positions in terms of number, locations, and duties should be re-evaluated in order to support the future programs in residential buildings.

(4) Produce different job descriptions and trainings for 1st-year RAs vs 2nd – 4th-year RAs.

Since the demand and expectations from the first-year residences are different those from the upper-class students, Residence Life should define separate job descriptions and provide different trainings to RAs based on the students they will support.

(5) Create common space in residential buildings.

When renovating residential buildings in the future, the design should include central and open floor lounges that can be used for multiple purposes, such as meetings, programming, and study.

(6) Consider creating designated houses or apartments for visiting scholars.

This would have the potential to save costs and would facilitate arrangements, allowing us to invite visitors who might then be in residence for longer periods.

(7) Help international students integrate into the broader College community.

Many international students expressed the challenge they feel when they tried to blend in with their American peers. The best way to help them cross the barrier is to pair them with roommates who have a strong passion for international cultures. RAs can design programs to mix international students with American students to play sports games or work on projects together with the purpose of lowering the culture barrier.

(8) Renovate dining facilities for multi-purpose events.

There is a need for spaces to promote various activities, tutoring, meetings, workshops, seminars, etc. that are hosted near the residential buildings. When dining facilities are due for renovation, the new design should consider different options for using the dining facilities for campus programming. This would allow space on campus to be used in a more efficient way.

(9) Develop a campus facilities plan that creates multiple "centers" on campus.

Develop a campus facilities plans that create multiple "centers" of campus to minimize the sense of distance from core locations for all residences.

(10) Use dining services for community building programming.

Dining could be used more intentionally by including certain programs. There are things that can be done to create more community in dining options. For example, making the dining centers more "homey" and less business-like in atmosphere would make students more likely to linger there and be a part of programming in the dining centers. Holding a class-only dinner in a dining center can help create a

better class identity. Having invitation-only events in the Foundation Room, Faculty-Staff Dining Room or some other venue at which students would be seated randomly to mingle with people they might not otherwise know would encourage students to cross their social boundaries.

(11) <u>Provide international food in dining centers</u>.
With the full meal plan, international students have fewer opportunities to enjoy the traditional food from their home countries. The residence life office can work with dining services to make international dishes available on certain festivals, promoting awareness of the diverse global cultures on campus. Dining Services can invite international students to recommend festivals for celebration, provide recipes for chefs to make, and serve food in the dining room.

(12) <u>Encourage faculty and staff to be connected with students through dining together</u>.
Provide small meal plans to faculty and staff (or reimburse a certain number of meals per semester) to encourage faculty and staff to eat with students. Faculty and staff's presence in dining halls sends the messages of one community and one set of behaviors for all times.

Academic Advising Recommendations

(1) Create rubrics and components for the community-based curriculum.
The Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs, the Division of Campus Life, and the Office of Career Services should work together to create the rubrics and identify the components to be included in the PARD program curriculum. These components need to be arranged in a developmental program over four years.

(2) Consider the formation of "mini-lectures" and discussions in the PARD program curriculum. These mini-lectures could be taught by various campus professionals in teams with faculty, the focus being college preparedness, study skills, intellectual integrity, scholarship, internship, career service, common course of study, etc. Discussions might be led by students, staff, or faculty with particular training or expertise in areas, including safe alcohol consumption, sexual assault and harassment, diversity, community responsibility, etc. Discussion groups should be small enough to encourage active engagement from all students.

(3) Make centralized information of advising available for students and faculty advisors.
The information faculty members need for advising, such as student transcripts, degree audit, resources for special needs students, scholarships, career services, course catalog, counseling, and academic support for students, are located in several places on the College web. The Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs should work with faculty members to identify the contents needed for advising and work with the ITS to make these contents available on the faculty advising handbook web page (http://facultyadvising.lafayette.edu/). It would be even more useful to have an advising webpage faculty can customize by themselves to align to program or department-specific advising demands. Lastly, a modified version that is made available to students would allow them to take more ownership of logistical considerations, thus allowing advisers to spend more time on broader advising issues, including career considerations, professional development, internship and externship advice, etc.

(4) Improve the distribution of advising load across faculty.
Faculty load on advising students is not evenly distributed. To maintain a good quality of student advising and a fair workload for faculty, the Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs should work with department heads to understand the distribution of advising load among departments. If needed, a cap of maximum number advisees per faculty should be set to prevent advising overload on certain faculty.

(5) <u>Assign faculty advisors to first-year students by division based on students' choices while maintaining a reasonably uniform distribution of advising load across the academic divisions.</u>

The Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs has been facing the challenge of finding enough faculty members to be advisors for freshmen. Considering what the best way is to serve students with their academic interests with the possibility of un-even student population across departments, it is recommended that Office of Advising and Co-Curricular Programs assign faculty advisors by division based on the students' choices in their applications. Advisors for the students who are undecided will be assigned to balance the advising load across divisions.

(6) <u>Provide incentive to faculty first-year students, extending to advisors of upper classes if funding is available.</u>

Advising first-year students is usually more demanding than advising other classes, considering first-year students need more help to settle into the new academic environment and expect more guidance for course selection as well as choosing a major. The College should consider a way to provide incentive to encourage faculty to advise first-year students. Such incentives will work best if they factor in not only number of advising commitments, but the quality of the advising sessions.

(7) <u>Consider the formation of a robust talent identification program for scholarships and fellowships.</u>

The College should create a means for identifying talented/promising young students and a deliberate pipeline for accessing prestigious scholarships and fellowships that involves faculty, administrators and staff that are on par with our peer institutions. In addition, first- and second-year students should be educated on the various scholarship/fellowship opportunities that exist which may help shape their academic and social paths as they move through the college.

(8) <u>Expand the peer-advising program to support students.</u>

Peer advising is currently in use as a summer communication tool with first-year students. Upper-level peer advisors could potentially begin their work with first-year students in the summer and then continue a more formal relationship with them in the fall semester when all students arrive on campus. This can be residentially based, academically based, or grounded by another means.

Peer advisors are a great support to first and second-year students. The Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs and the Office of the Dean of Students should consider a structure to select students to be peer advisors, provide a training program to prepare them, and establish a network for peer advisors to share information with each other.

(9)   Enhance academic support to special populations of students.
As the student population is diversified on campus, the need of academic support is also varied. With the increase of student bodies from special populations, such as at-risk students, first generation college students, and international students, there might be a need for a summer program to better prepare some admitted first-year students in quantitative skills and/or English proficiency before first-year orientation. One of the options is to provide some study guides and recommend some courses available online for students to take voluntarily.

The Office of Advising and Co-curricular Programs should work with faculty advisors to understand the needs of special populations and increase academic support, such as mini workshops, drop-in tutoring, supplemental instructions, etc. With the quick rise of an international student population on campus, the College Writing Program should consider providing more writing support to international students.

(10) Determine a method of centralizing the college's already existing academic support.
Perhaps all support could be administered by one office, or there could simply be a means of collaborating across departments/offices to ensure students and the campus at-large is aware of the various types of support available (i.e. WAs, calculus cavalry, The ATTIC, department-specific tutoring, etc).

(11) Supplemental Instruction should be present in all sections of a course.
Right now SI is offered in some sections of a course, not all, which creates an uneven level of support, especially for first-year students. Departments can make decisions on courses to be offered with SI; these decisions must be uniformly applicable to all sections of those courses.

(12) Provide more support to sophomores.
Consider giving more robust support to sophomores who face significant challenges during this year (different living environment, peer support, decisions related to Greek rushing, major declaration, etc).

Learning beyond the Classroom Recommendations

(1) Establish a strong partnership between faculty and staff to bridge the academic, social, and personal development of students' experiences.
Studies have shown that collaboration and integration of academic affairs and student affairs is important to the success of creating a learning community. Services from faculty and staff are equally important to integrate whole student experience – academic, social, and personal.

(2) Create additional campus-wide traditions and events to evoke a sense of Lafayette pride, a set of experiences that are common for all students.
Traditions play a unique role in the culture of student life. They have the potential to teach students about the history of the College, provide a means of building community, instill common values that span generations of students, and generate pride and enthusiasm. The College should work with student leaders to create/identify college traditions that can promote building a college-wide community. Ensure that these traditions feel collegiate and connected.

(3) Create a leadership competency rubric based on the college vision of leadership model.
There are a few options that can be considered, including studying Marquis de Lafayette's leadership skills or working with pre-existing campus initiatives (e.g., IDEAL, e-folio).

(4) Conduct a leadership learning audit of current campus programs, ex: GM and V courses in the common course of study, IDEAL courses.
Some courses offered in the common course of study include some components needed for leadership. Faculty members who believe the courses they offer contain the components for leadership can request for an audit conducted by the student leadership program. If passed, students can take those courses to satisfy some of the requirements for their leadership training. This audit process reduces the possibility of duplicate efforts to offer the same contents. It also acknowledges students' ability to practice the skills and knowledge they learn in classrooms

(5) Identify a documentation system to record evidence of students' progress in leadership Training.
A documentation system to record the progress of student leadership training is important for the leadership-training program. This documentation system should be able to track students' progress, certify students who are developing strong leadership skills, and keep track in a streamlined way of student leaders who are now alumni. Outside companies (e.g., OrgSync) provide such a service, but it

would require a financial commitment from the College. The ITS office should work with the student leadership program and other programs that can benefit from using this type of software to identify the appropriate software package.

(6) <u>Integrate the leadership-training program with the community-based curriculum</u>.
Student leadership training should be part of the PARD program curriculum proposed in this report. The office of student leadership and involvement should consider integrating this leadership-training program with the curriculum.

(7) <u>Provide leadership-training programs/workshops during interim session</u>.
Using the interim session to run leadership training programs and workshops is a good way to make use of the College's facilities during interim. It allows students to learn useful skills without the concern of conflicts with their course work.

(8) <u>Encourage students taking leadership development as part of their professional development</u>.
Outcomes from student leadership development also support professional development, improve résumé quality, and enhance students' ability to acquire jobs that require future leaders.

(9) <u>Structure leadership opportunities to have upper-level students take on mentoring roles for younger students</u>.
Upper-level students become segregated as they move on. Providing opportunities for upper-level students to mentor younger students strengthens the connections between students in different classes, which helps build a stronger community.

(10) <u>Offer opportunities to special populations of students to contribute to the college community</u>.
Students from special populations could be good resources to support some multi-culture and foreign language courses by sharing their own experiences with the course instructors and students in class. For example, by pairing international students with students taking courses in foreign language, students can help each other improve their language capability. It also helps students to cross the culture barrier through their conversation. The Office of Intercultural Development and the International Student Association can work with faculty to find courses that can use the support and identify students to provide help.

(11) <u>Require student organizations to maintain annual reports of their activities</u>.
Faculty members play an important role in advising student organizations. Student organizations should maintain annual reports of their activities. Annual reports will serve not only as documentation of student leadership activities but will allow

faculty advisers an enhanced opportunity to understand the organization's development and both past and current challenges.

Faculty Involvement in Integrating the Student Experience

Faculty-student interaction is an essential component of the collegiate experience (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014). Significant research has demonstrated the importance of interaction between faculty and students both inside and outside of the classroom. Astin found that faculty-student interaction had a positive effect on both cognitive and affective student development (1993) and that faculty-student interaction showed a strong impact on student satisfaction in college (1977). Kuh, Douglas, Lund, and Ramin-Gyurnek (1994) encouraged an increase in student-faculty interactions in order to improve career choice, personal growth, and student persistence. Wilson and Gaff (1975) found that faculty labeled as "most outstanding" and having the "most impact" on students were those who most frequently interacted with students outside of the classroom.

Recognizing that faculty's involvement is crucial to the success of integrating student experiences, the College should allow more flexibility in the guidelines for faculty's professional development to encourage faculty interacting with students outside classrooms.

(1)   The Task Force recognizes that many Lafayette College faculty members currently engage in extensive service to the College, their departments, and their professions. Furthermore, the Task Force recommends that service outside classrooms be more highly valued and recognized appropriately in salary and promotion decisions.

(2)   If valuable in pedagogical terms, faculty members are encouraged to hold some classes outside of standard classroom sites.

(3)   If faculty interacting with students outside classrooms contains the value of education, this type of activity should be considered as "teaching" instead of "service."

(4)   Specific activities, including mentoring independent study and thesis students, should be incentivized in a more direct and transparent manner, as an incredible amount of student learning is achieved in these experiences.

Establishing Spaces for Community Development

"Although campus and alumni stakeholders may disagree over the preferred solutions, a wide consensus exists that the College must address the perceived lack of healthy social platforms for the kinds of interpersonal and social interactions necessary for personal maturation and self-esteem." (Laf360 Introduction & Initial Ideas)

The Task Force submits the following recommendations to address the concern of spaces and opportunities for community development.

(1) When the Farinon College Center is due for renovation, the college should consider how to use the space in Farinon to promote community development.

(2) Spaces designed for socializing need to be more accessible on campus - especially medium- and large-sized social spaces. Policies should allow for groups of students to hold events in such spaces, even if those events are as simple as dance parties. "Spinning" was a Lafayette tradition in recent years, and current space restrictions have virtually eliminated such campus-wide dance parties, despite their value both as social outlets and as an alternative to alcohol consumption.

(3) Create multiple spaces for dancing, music performance, and class nights. These spaces can be part of the campus facilities plan that creates multiple "centers" on campus and can in some instance be made available to the public.

(4) Establish alcohol policies for parties in campus spaces that balance safety and liability with enough flexibility and simplicity that students will still consider the event "fun." The current 1 drink per hour policy at The Spot is universally despised. Students should have the opportunity to throw parties that are open to the entire community and attractive enough to encourage participation. The combination of social spaces with more reasonable alcohol policies can be used to encourage safer drinking practices and to offer social outlets unconnected to Greek life.

(5) Promote student clubs hosting events that allow public participation.

(6) Under legal conditions, establish social settings crafted to produce a positive drinking culture that allows faculty, staff, and students to interact together.

(7) Create easily accessible pools of programming funds and offer improved guidance for students in organizing and hosting events.

(8)   Design spaces that combine social aspects with studying, for example, social study spaces in the library, student lounges in academic buildings, or study/social lounges in dormitories.

Conclusion

The College provides many well-designed co-curricular and extracurricular programs for student development, such as the Excel scholar program to gain research experience, the Gateway program for career development, the service-learning programs to support local and global communities, and the leadership education program to prepare future leaders. As Lafayette students are increasingly drawn towards opportunities to connect their intellectual interests in the classrooms with their out-of-class activities and their living arrangements, these discrete programs need to be centralized and integrated to minimize potential scheduling conflicts in order to make these programs more accessible to students.

A fading relevance of Greek Life among some students and the shrinking number of fraternities reduced the number of obvious platforms for developing leadership skills, personal and social growth, and safe risk-taking that are all necessary for healthy student development and preparation for life after Lafayette. As a result, there is an urgent need for social spaces on campus for community development.

The Task Force recommends enhancing residence life as the central platform to build a living-learning community and creating a community-based curriculum (PARD) to establish connections across various co- and extracurricular programs on the platform. The enhanced residence life program will house students in clusters to facilitate the building of class identity and strengthen the sense of campus community. The PARD program on the residence platform provides opportunities for students to explore the connections between their academic and social lives as they take part in activities that go beyond the classrooms and extend into the residence halls and the Lafayette community. The Task Force also recommends creating multiple social spaces on campus with consumer-friendly policies to encourage students to host social events in order to promote community development.

Faculty's involvement is critically important to the success of building a strong living-learning community at Lafayette. When they extend their support outside the classrooms as advisors and mentors, faculty should be acknowledged and rewarded.

The comprehensive set of recommendations provided in this report is a system, built on residential housing, to connect academic, social, and personal development. These recommendations, if adopted, would enrich Lafayette's capacity to attract the brightest and most engaged students and to compete successfully within the changing higher education landscape.

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