

**Comprehensive Program Review
Report of the Site Review Team
Office of Student Life
Illinois State University
May 2003**

Mission of the Office

- The mission should be reviewed with regard to the vision of the office. Does the mission of direct program, service, and advising delivery fit completely with the new desired mission of a student leadership model or student delivered program model?
- In a discussion of the alignment of program and service areas it appears that this office has elements of two missions...one is more related to a traditional dean of students office and one is more related to a student activities office. We suggest a comprehensive review of the realignment of these areas (see structure for further discussion.)
- As the mission is reviewed, there are certain areas of the Office of Student Life that might be aligned in yet another functional area (beyond the Dean of Students and Student Activities areas). We suggest the review of a potential Transitions Office that would be responsive to both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs and would include the following program elements: Preview, Passages, FOI, Commencement and the Parents Programs.
- The mission should be reviewed to identify the cogent one or two sentence mission and the subsequent strategic priorities and core values. Perhaps the one line of the mission that is most descriptive and could be easily used in outreach is "...to teach and model appreciation of others, cultivate caring citizens, and enhance individual and group leadership skills."
- The external review team believes that there are elements of the current operation that do not match the stated and inferred mission (see program area review). It is suggested that these areas be reassigned or realigned within the University.
- The mission and how it is carried out appears to flow from very intentional decisions and assessment and reflection that appear to be a hallmark of this staff. It is especially obvious that the staff has recast the central focus of the Office of Student Life from a "bystander" approach to an engaging campus approach where standards, values and priorities are stated and constituents are made aware of how those standards are applied. This helps to hold groups and individuals accountable.
- The mission and the delivery of service, programs and advising suggest the desire to create a climate for involvement. This is obviously occurring but it is an area that needs more attention and further growth.

Office and Structural Issues

- It is apparent that the Office of Student Life staff is exceptionally committed to the tasks they have been assigned. It is also obvious that additional staff is needed in this area. Most particularly, it appears that additional support staff is necessary. Further, we believe that a full time web master might enhance the communication and outreach of the office and the various Registered Student Organizations (RSO). We would also suggest that as functional areas grow, they requires the careful review of staffing needs. An example of this is the advent of greater Student Government advising and the assignment of that function to the person responsible for advising the University Programming Board. These functions may need to be undertaken by two different people.
- Students spoke highly of the climate of the office, as did colleagues. The staff is perceived to be dedicated, resourceful, and caring of its varied constituents.
- Graduate students employed in the office commented on the very positive learning environment and mentoring for graduate assistants that existed in the Office of Student Life. This nurturing was viewed as critical to their success as key staff members and service delivery agents in the Office of Student Life.
- There were very few criticisms of the physical office space. One confusing point noted was the difficulty in determining where the point of entry is in receiving front line attention. With more than one apparent receptionist or front line staff member it can be difficult for customers to ascertain where to begin their transaction.
- Cross training of staff, particularly front line staff including receptionists and support staff might assist people in responding to questions and needs of walk in and call in customers. This may be particularly appropriate for front desk student receptionists and graduate assistants.
- The diversity of the staff including the graduate assistants is an area that needs to be reviewed. Students often like to see people that reflect their own gender, ethnicity, culture and sexuality as they seek assistance. As the OSL grows its service constituency to be more inclusive, the diversity of the staff will be an even more critical issue.
- It appears that some of the functions of this office truly are accidents of history or person specific. It is important that all functions of the area be reviewed for centrality to the mission and fit with the student service delivery model. Where will students be best served? What makes sense to customers and colleagues (both in and out of the office)? On occasion it seems that the OSL has become a “dumping ground” for programs and staff, in large part because of the dedicated staff in the OSL, the programs are delivered with success that cements their inclusion in the OSL.
- As budget cuts loom large, this already overtaxed group of people may suffer the effects of being asked to do even more with less. It appears that while the communication of the staff is exceptional, the messages of cutbacks and reductions are beginning to take their toll. The impact on morale will have to be monitored in the future.

- The opportunities for advancement are limited in this organization. It suggests that a review of entry-level positions vs. positions that require more experience might be necessary. It appears that many of the individuals are granted titles to insure a rate of pay commensurate with the market value. Could a system of Program Coordinators and Assistant Directors, where the former were entry-level positions and the latter were more experienced, evolve? Pay would have to be commensurate with required experience. We recommend reviewing the employment grades of existing staff to determine if there is a means to equate performance expectations and level of status in the organization with an appropriate grade of pay. Further, the mode of relying on graduate assistants, as the primary employees in new program areas may not be the most effective in building new programs. This is particularly negative in insuring program consistency from year to year. The benefit of a targeted full time employee in building the Service Learning area has certainly suggested that this may be the preferred method.
- One critique of office practice that deserves a small mention is that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain if staff are in and available for interaction. This is especially difficult when determining whether graduate assistants are in the office. This may be the result of a lack of front line support staff that can help customers with this information. Further, availability may not just be about presence in the office but may affect the timeliness of phone response. Without appropriate information about the whereabouts of staff, front line staff are left to give callers less than complete information about when calls or questions might be returned.

Office Operations and Interaction

- This staff enjoys an exceptional sense of team. Communication is very fluid, including up and down the organization and beyond the organization to more senior administrators. People genuinely seem to like each other and to enjoy working on tasks and innovation together.
- This organization is credited with being one of the most creative and innovative among the Student Affairs staff. The use of assessment and benchmarking to launch creative new ventures is perceived to be a hallmark of this group.
- Students perceive this organization as resourceful and caring. Staff are viewed as welcoming to students.
- People on the staff were universally believed to be individuals who exercise great initiative. They feel supported in this by the leadership of the office. There is very little evidence of “fear of failure” in launching new events and services.
- The group has established collaborative relationships among their own colleagues and with those outside of the office. These relationships are often person specific. It appears that often the quality of people inside this organization nourish these relationships.

- Staff appear to be knowledgeable about their areas. Their work is informed by literature, research involvement in professional associations, benchmarking, and an assessment of best practice. This assessment feeds back into continual improvement in practice, programs and service delivery.

Collaboration Within the Division

- It appears that the OSL has nurtured a variety of collaborative relationships that have resulted in quality programs and services for students (e.g. Counseling Center and Student Health Services particularly in the area of alcohol awareness and sexuality). These relationships may be very person specific and, as a result, may result in departmental relationships being stymied if there are staff changes.
- There appears to be programmatic overlaps with a variety of staff in the Student Affairs Division. This is obvious in the entertainment area with the Bone Student Center. It is also present in the Leadership area with both the Intercultural Center (the Intercultural Retreat might be merged with Camp Lead) and the work that Residential Life is undertaking. Further, the work with academic colleagues might be partnered with OSL and ORL.
- The creation of a Transitions Office could capitalize on existing partnerships and create a more seamless program if the following groups and/or operating areas were combined: Preview, Passages, FOI, Commencement and Parent Services. The last organization appears to fit into this area, although with less certainty. It appears that this working unit or Transitions Office would require the engagement of both the Student Affairs Division and Academic Affairs.
- The review team believed that the Division of Student Affairs and the students it serves could benefit from an enhanced definition of task in a variety of areas. Most particularly, the Bone Student Center would be enhanced as a facility and a student-centered location on campus if an Office of Student Activities were created and located there. In addition, the Student Government Association and the RSOs would be relocated to the Bone Student Center. Entertainment functions could be merged with those in the Bone Student Center to deliver outstanding programs for students, faculty and staff with a smaller focus on programs for the community. Simultaneously, a Dean of Students Office would need to be created that would take on a major advocacy role for students. This organization could be housed in the Student Services Building and an architectural link might be made between the two facilities.
- The Division of Student Affairs seems ripe with potential partners for the OSL. In our meetings with department chairs within the Division, we heard a number of leaders express growing interest for partnering with the OSL. This was particularly true in light of recent budget cuts. Among the ready partners were members of the Student Health Services staff and the Counseling Center staff. The opportunity to partner with Student Recreation Services on issues associated with sports clubs seems obvious. Greater partnership with

Residential Life, particularly in the area of service learning seems like it would enhance the work of OSL and afford them a market share among resident students. Partnerships will be enhanced with regular communication, including the communication of expectations of colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs by members of the OSL staff, particularly when program partnership is desired or staff members are invited to participate in program offered by the OSL. This communication was viewed as somewhat lacking at the present time.

- We believe that a comprehensive review of policies and sanctions related to issues such as posting on campus, alcohol use and distribution, meeting room use, fee expenditures, and services for disabled persons might be in order. In our meetings with staff it became apparent that even within the Division of Student Affairs, different departments were operating with different rules, policies and sanctions. A comprehensive review of these policies at the Divisional level would certainly help the OSL to serve students with integrity, but it would likely help other departments within the University as well.

Audience

- It appears that the OSL primarily serves undergraduate students. To be more specific, the organization appears to serve primarily undergraduate students of traditional age who are white. We believe a review of the constituency of this office is in order. How might the organization better serve students of color, graduate students and transfer students?
- Several staff members noted some difficulty in recruiting students to serve on programming bodies and/or in leadership areas. New strategies for reaching out to students are necessary. How might access to first year students alter this model? How could upperclass students issue personal invitations to younger students? How might the entertainment committees benefit if they were able to enlarge their group to include more men, students of color and music and theater majors?
- The Office of Student Life needs to market its programs and services to the campus community. While involved students may come to know the menu of services available, it is difficult to determine how uninvolved students and/or their mentors and advisors might determine to help students take advantage of the opportunities sponsored by the OSL. In addition to print and web based outreach, we recommend that the members of the OSL get out more. Geography can be isolating and while the Student Services Building might have a wide range of student traffic, it might not attract students from all corners of campus. Staff should be encouraged to “put a face on the Office of Student Life.”
- The staff seems to be very intent on providing programs that interest students, but it appears that often the programs are reproduced every year without assessing whether student interest supports these existing programs. The

committee recommends that a method of customer needs assessment be introduced to answer the question, if we listen to students, what will we learn?

- How might the OSL broaden the numbers and kinds of people served if we were to merge programs with other areas? For instance, if Camp Lead were merged with the Intercultural Retreat what might be the benefits? If recognition ceremonies for OSL and the Intercultural Center were merged, what might be the benefits? How might the placement of the Intercultural Center in closer proximity to the Office of Student Activities enhance the involvement of more diverse students?
- Attention needs to be paid to how to engage students at every stage of their enrollment. Specifically, what should first year students experience with regard to leadership development and service? How is that different than second or third year students?
- Most of the students participating in the comprehensive leadership programs, such as LeaderShape, appear to be those students involved in the SGA and Greek organizations. This curriculum would be of benefit to a more diverse audience of students including uninvolved students. It would appear this inclusion of a diverse audience would also enhance the program for all participants. Finally, following large-scale leadership learning conferences and workshops, follow up was viewed to be less than adequate for participants, leaving them to ask, “What next?”
- Advisors, and particularly faculty advisors, are a significant constituency of the OSL. The advent of training for faculty advisors is good. How might this program be enhanced if combined in some way with the training done for faculty fellows in Resident Life? How might a new Provost inspire (or reward) faculty for engagement in student life? How will budget shortfalls further diminish the faculty involvement?
- Student organization advisors would appear to be a great resource to the Office of Student Life. They might be very useful partners in training other advisors. This is especially true for existing and experienced advisors who might be used as mentors and trainers for newer organization advisors.
- The values cited in “Educating Illinois” might be better used to encourage and cement service by faculty and staff in advising student groups.
- The OSL should explore ways Academic Affairs might recognize service learning in the ASPT process.
- External constituencies and agencies seem to be a growing partner with OSL. This is especially evident in the Service Learning area. This relationship will need to be cultivated. Cultivating these relationships may be enhanced if partners in other areas of the University are identified who also interact with the same agencies.
- It is critical that the Office of Student Life do an assessment of who the recipients are of their various programs. Further, who are the intended recipients? During the course of our interviews, we heard reference to programs for undergraduate students, but we also heard individuals and groups advocating that programs be delivered to city residents and leaders, faculty and staff, and graduate students and graduate student organizations.

This does not discount the importance of undergraduate students or the Greek population that appear to be central recipients of the programs currently offered, it suggests the need to clarify the programming mission and intended audience.

Rethinking Student Centered Space

- While this report is specific to the Office of Student Life, it appears to that the Bone Student Center is inexorably linked to the OSL and the desire to create student-centered space. This is most obvious when trying to create a climate of student engagement. In meeting with Student Affairs colleagues and students it became readily apparent that an objective of the Division of Student Affairs and the OSL and other units in the Student Services Building should be on how to create a campus environment where involvement is fostered and student engagement is high. The creation of a lively student center appears to be critical to this objective.
- Areas that need to be addressed to insure increased student activities and involvement include: a student activities office, service learning center, a location for registered student organizations and the Student Government Association, the Intercultural Office, and locations that allowed opportunities for leisure, recreation, food and retail purchase, and “hanging out.” Locating the Recreation Center adjacent to these services and/or to the Bone Student Center might further enhance this.
- Certain University policies would need to be addressed if students were to be the centerpiece of campus life. Included would be the Late Night Programming Policy, the hours of operation of the Bone Student Center, meeting room use, and the process of reserving space for all locations on the campus. With regard to the latter, we suggest that the University study the centralizing of this function for the ease of its customers.

Programming

- Programming to enhance late night and weekend life on campus was a point raised in many of our interviews. In discussions about alcohol abuse, the “suitcase status” of the campus in the minds of some students, and the lack of weekend options observed by other staff and students, it appears that a concerted effort to enlarge and address the need for weekend programming is critical. It was suggested that departments and RSOs might be encouraged to place their programs on weekends in addition to hosting predictable weekend programs that would be hosted by the various entertainment committees. Greek Life organizations might also be encouraged to add to the weekend program mix in ways other than just social parties.

- Predictable and well-packaged weekend and night programs are critical. While entertainment and options for involvement, including the Capen Cinema, may be present on weekend nights, they may need to be marketed in a more attractive manner and linked to a weekend program scheme. The Bone Student Center is critical in this area as are entertainment committees. This area is critical in addressing alcohol abuse. Alternative programs to what is offered in the local community that are attractive to students are critical in building a lively weekend campus life.
- The University Program Board could be enhanced if it was realigned with the Bone Student Center and its programming arms. It is likely all the program entities could be merged. It was noted that this organization would benefit from greater recruitment of members including students of color, men, and people from theater and music. One of the hallmarks of their programming series should be the advent of more weekend programs.
- One of the programming areas that is present but needs to be enlarged are programs addressing alcohol and sexuality. Partnerships for delivering these programs appear to be present, but the need to enhance these efforts, even in difficult budget times is critical in response to student need.
- Organization advisors and student leaders both pointed to the need to enhance the programming and training related to how to build student organizations. This training outreach might also include how to manage events and how to manage monies allocated to student organizations.

Academic Partnerships

- While the staff in OSL enjoys many rich relationships with academic colleagues, this is an area that requires some attention. Several program specific partnerships are in order.
- The Service Learning staff should link with the Center for Advancement of Teaching and Campus Compact to enlarge the possibility of linking co-curricular community service with in-class service learning. The review team recognizes that the current staff in OSL can't conceptualize and design a service learning program, but academic partners and/or a committee working together might make this happen. An additional partner would be the Honors Program as they work with the Presidential Scholars on their required community service.
- The Leadership area is also an area for partnership. With the advent of the Leadership Institute and shared grant money, this area stands to benefit from enlarged academic partnerships. Suggested points of partnership include the FOI instructors and General Education instructors who might allow a discussion of leadership and service learning in their classes. Further, the partnership with Residential Life in nurturing young leaders and using faculty to mentor these young leaders is critical.

- The development of faculty advisors and mentors for registered student organizations was a point of serious discussion in many of our groups. One of the chief concerns was how to appropriately reward these individuals for their service. This is an area that requires additional study on the part of the OSL staff.
- Advisors would benefit from greater training in the facilitative role. How might staff in the OSL teach advisors how to facilitate the development of student groups? What resources in the forming of groups or their training and organizational development might be provided advisors that would enhance their facilitation of these processes? We heard, especially from experienced advisors, that they felt current advisor training “told them what to do” but it did not respond to their process oriented needs. It might be advantageous to administer a survey to individual advisors to ascertain what their specific individual training needs are. A training program devised to meet these individualized needs would appear to be more effective.

Program Specific Review

- One area in the review of how to appropriately place the function of advising various groups might be to review whether the advising function of the SGA is appropriately placed in the OSL. The recent enlargement of the advising role by OSL staff with the SGA was viewed as positive, but it appears that this function might be placed in a potential Dean of Students Office. The power and centrality of the SGA in University governance suggest that the organization’s advisor might come from a more senior administrator including a possible Dean of Students or, if no Dean of Students function is adopted, perhaps the advising might be elevated to an Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs.
- Staff and students reviewed the new online election process positively.
- Transfer, non-traditional, and graduate students need someplace to call home. It appears that the OSL has put them on a lower priority than undergraduate students but this is an area that will require review. A partnership with the Graduate School could greatly enhance the service delivery to graduate students. While graduate students may require different things from a centralized student life office as compared to undergraduates, their participation in the life of the campus is still important. This was particularly obvious when talking with graduate students.
- Outreach to the Advisory Board of Safe Zone appears to be in order. There is a perception among students and faculty and staff that LGBT individuals in the ISU community are not as welcomed. Partnering with members of the Advisory Board as well as students and the staff in the Intercultural Center to address past misunderstandings and to identify new services and programs

that would better serve LGBT students, as well as faculty and staff, might greatly enhance the climate for LGBT persons on the campus and the general climate on the campus.

- Passages would benefit from realigning it with other pre-school functions, specifically Preview. Shared leadership of all transition programs would enhance the infusion of academic and student affairs interests.
- Overlap in programs should be addressed between the OSL and the Bone Student Center. This would be particularly important if the two organizations were to be geographically located together. Included would be the Entertainment Committees, the training of student leaders and employees, and the opportunity to introduce a more student leadership/management focused model into the operation of the Bone Student Center
- The RSO area is an area that is benefiting from careful program review. The alteration of the manual for RSOs is a great example of how policies and procedures should be reviewed and altered with some regularity. The alteration of the RSO registration process to be more efficient is lauded.
- One area that requires attention is the need for a more dedicated means of spending fees allocated to the RSOs. It is suggested that a student organization accounts area (and staff required to support this) be introduced in the Office of Student Life to oversee the expenditures of monies allocated to the RSOs and SGA. While this would require the addition of new staff, we believe it is critical. This agency would oversee and review the expenditures of fees allocated during the funding process. Further, they might help groups to be more responsive to the University community by asking them to produce a one page summary of how prior year funds were disbursed to support programs or services. This new service center could also help to establish a cadre of RSO liaisons with the office that would be responsible for disbursing funds. Determining the appropriate interplay between the advisors and designated student leaders in the disbursement of funds would be a critical first step for this new agency.
- Nite Ride is an important student service, but it is not central to the mission of this office. We believe it should be relocated to another agency (perhaps parking) and that the service should be funded and expanded by working to secure funds from local, state and federal grants in conjunction with the local community. Additional funds might be raised by looking at whether retail agents on the bus route would pay or contribute for the ridership to their venues. Reform in this area should also include a review of the Transit Authority's service and how this meets or does not meet student needs. As innovation is made in this area, and particularly as alternative forms of funding are sought that link the town to the University via the Transit Authority, it is critical that students' voices not be missed in decision-making. Even if the administration of Nite Ride is relocated on campus and/or if the transit systems are linked to off campus agencies, it is imperative that a student representative be on the decision making body and that students' needs be reflected in decision making about service delivery.

- The Media Lab is a fine service for a limited number of students but it is not central to the mission of this office. This service site might be part of a larger RSO service center, but fees would need to be raised to insure this service center was self-supporting. If this is not possible, we recommend that this service be reviewed for possible relocation to areas including the College of Education, the Library, and print services on campus.
- The Red Dog Chili Supper appears to be an idea that has outlived its interest. It is suggested that this event be eliminated in favor of a new event that both raises funds and showcases the staff in Student Affairs at Family Weekend.
- Parents Services is viewed as a wonderful referral area. The staff working in this area do outstanding outreach with parents through Preview, Area Meetings, and have an increased presence on the web site. The Parent's Advisory Board appears to be working well. While the person in this position enjoys referral power, there may need to be some investigation as to how the position is aligned. Current staff benefit from the colleagues in the OSL and from having direct contact with students, but could this function be better served if it was aligned with a Transitions Office or a Dean of Students Office. This is an area requiring study.
- Commencement is ably handled because of the people involved. It does not appear to be central to the mission but the quality of staff involved in the program have greatly benefited the campus tradition. It is suggested that this area be explored for inclusion in a Transitions Office. Also, it is suggested that this area have even greater partnership with academic departments.
- Assessment is a new venture of this office but they are apparently undertaking it with some regularity. It is the strength of this organization that they put their findings into play with the advent of new programs and services. We commend them for introducing assessment and practice that is informed by research into the culture of the office. We suggest that the assessment of policies and publications be one of the areas of future study. A regular review of both procedures and policies would be of benefit to the staff and the end users. This is very visible in the work being done to the very outdated RSO manual. In addition, a regular review of student needs and interests should be undertaken annually. These findings should inform practices and programs.
- Homecoming is a growing tradition on the campus. It was evident in meetings with staff and students that the University, on the whole, lacks a certain amount of school spirit and loyalty. While attempts to address this, such as red and white day, are honorable, more needs to be done in this area. Included might be greater involvement in the planning and executing of Homecoming and other campus wide programming. Homecoming might benefit from more student participation in planning and events including greater participation on the part of the Greek students.
- The Greek community is not living up to its potential. The University should undertake a comprehensive review of Greek Life. The governance structure appears to be present but the communication between the three coordinating groups appears lacking. The relationship with the City of Normal, particularly in the enforcement of health and fire safety regulations appears to be lacking.

There is an apparent culture in the Greek community that is competitive between groups rather than cooperative. Further, Greek organizations appear to be failing to meet the standards set forth by the University and their national organizations. A decline in recruitment numbers suggests that students may not be looking at this involvement option as favorably. Students involved in the Greek community commented on the fatigue the leaders feel in trying to keep organizations afloat or successfully pursuing their goals. The absence of faculty involvement and/or alumni involvement is apparent and the chapters suffer as a result. It is suggested that a major review of the organizations, the involvement of all parties (national organizations, local alumni, faculty, and University personnel), and a review of student leadership in this area be undertaken with some haste. The system appears to be of limited benefit to the institution.

- The OSL budget, particularly the allocation of fees is an interesting area for study.
- The Service Learning and community service area is one of the bright new innovations in the OSL. The potential for growth in this area in partnership with Academic Affairs and with RSO as well as the Career Center and Residential Life are enormous. We laud the first steps of the staff in this area and the outcomes thus far and suggest the nurturing of these partnerships to increase the impact of service on the curriculum and student learning and development.

General Comments

- With ever increasing budget shortfalls we think it is incumbent on the Office of Student Life to seek additional grant funds. There are programs within the area that might be attractive to corporate and philanthropic organizations. This has already been witnessed in the leadership area with the new money anticipated in the coming fiscal year.
- In one of our meetings we learned that a service called “Students on Patrol” was slated to be eliminated for lack of funds. While this may be a wise decision, members of the University Police department seemed troubled by this decision. Conversations about the decision might be in order.

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