Carnegie Mellon University

Enhancing Campus Culture
Amy Burkert and Gina Casalegno
Background

Student Death on Campus

Tartan Editorial: The Happy Mask Published 12/12/12

160+ Comments, Significant Social Media Activity

A Campus Conversation was Launched
Town Hall: January 28, 2013

Co-facilitated by Amy Burkert, Gina Casalegno, Meela Dudley
(Student Body Vice President)

Over 250 attendees: students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, Deans and Senior Administration

Issues of stress, wellness, success explored from deeply personal vantage points.
Town Hall Themes

• Success at CMU means “doing more” and often at the cost of “taking less care of oneself.”

• When students realize they have taken on too much, they fear that they will be seen as a failure and struggle through without a clear sense of what they should be doing.

• Those who had sought help spoke of a stigma they felt was attached to needing help.
Town Hall Themes, cont.

• Some articulated their uncertainty as to how to make the best use of the resources the university provides and others found these resources were insufficient for their needs.

• Some speakers talked of reflecting on what elements of their education—in and out of the classroom—were most important to their goals and success. They reported finding happiness and balance in the conscious choice to limit coursework and activities and felt supported by their peers in this pursuit.
Media Engagement

Pittsburgh Post Gazette Coverage and Editorials

WESA, Pittsburgh’s Local NPR Affiliate, Essential Pittsburgh Radio Show: Interview with Happy Mask Author, Student Body President and Dean of Student Affairs

Ongoing forum by students in social media outlets
Campus Conversation Continued

Partnership with Students for Deliberative Democracy (S4DD)

March 19 Deliberative Loop: Over 100 attendees

![Pie chart showing participants: Undergraduates, Graduate Students, Faculty, Staff, Alumni]
Deliberative Loop Format

Pre- and Post-Surveys

Facilitated small group discussion
• Defining Success
• Academic Environment
• Personal Wellness

Expert panel
Results of the Deliberative Loop

Of twenty possible opportunities CMU should explore that would have the most positive impact, the top five selections that emerged from post-survey results were:

- Greater oversight and alignment of course units to actual work load
- Equipping students with the tools to be greater self-advocates of their personal well-being
- Services to talk with a trained counselor about stress/concerns at the immediate point of need
- Peer mentoring programs
- Seminar for the first year undergraduate transition to Carnegie Mellon
Request for Proposals

Enhancing Campus Culture (ECC) Fund

• Partnership among Student Government, the Vice Provost for Education, and the Division of Student Affairs

• $15,000 seed funding to positively impact campus culture through initiatives that promote a climate of well-being

• Distributed to students, faculty, staff and alumni (through the Alumni Board)

• 9 innovative proposals submitted
RFP Results

**Mental Health First Aid Training**
12-hour course that trains members of the community how to respond to mental health emergencies, reduce the stigma of mental illness and improve mental health literacy.

**Mindfulness Room**
A room for the purpose of quiet mindfulness where students can retreat to a peaceful place on campus where healthy relaxation is encouraged.

**Project Smile**
To improve the overall morale of the student body by utilizing random acts of kindness, fostering opportunity for frivolity on campus, and creating a “Say Something Nice” campaign.

**thrive@CMU**
First year course to help students understand the unique demands of life at CMU and to instill healthy ways to manage challenges. Focus on easing the transition to life at CMU and building a thriving undergraduate experience.
Small Group Discussion

• Reflecting on your CMU experience, how do these themes resonate for you?
• Would you change anything about the CMU environment (referring to your own experience or what you understand the experience to be today)?
• What would you want to impart to a student about how to maximize their CMU experience while upholding a commitment to personal wellbeing?
• How can alumni be involved in supporting students during their CMU tenure?
Large Group Discussion

- Small group summaries
- Themes
- Discussion on possible next steps to leverage alumni engagement in support of the student experience
Wrap Up and Thank you

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