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NSC Student Life Strategic Plan

Executive Summary



Student Life Strategic Plan: Phase I

Nevada State College is undergoing dramatic institutional change. The fledgling startup that emerged from a refurbished warehouse now rises to meet the aspirations of over 4800 students. At the forefront of this institutional change is a seismic shift in our student population. In the past five years alone, the proportion of full-time freshmen in our overall student body has nearly doubled, from 13 percent to 25 percent, and the advent of our first residence halls promises to forever alter the composition of our campus. To address this ongoing evolution, and continue to fulfill our foremost goal of promoting student success, the institution itself must evolve. To this end, the present document summarizes the initial development of a Student Life Strategic Plan that outlines the programs, services, and resources needed to foster a vibrant and engaging campus life experience at NSC. True to the spirit of the college, the final plan will be forged through innovation, evidence-based practices, and broad campus collaboration.

Plan Objectives:

1. To identify the key areas of emphasis for a robust student life experience at NSC
2. To create a framework that helps guide effective initiatives in each of the key areas
3. To ensure that students have safe and productive options to engage in social and learning activities

Of essential importance in meeting these objectives is a student life experience that helps us attract and retain high school students who are prioritizing their education, which in turn supports our foremost institutional goal of improving graduation rates. Moreover, the pursuit of these goals will be grounded by a careful consideration of the resources – including personnel – needed to implement and sustain the associated programming and services. This executive summary chronicles the first phase of the planning process, completed in August 2018, and charts the next steps in developing a comprehensive strategic plan.

The Process: Phase I

Guided by a charge put forth by President Patterson, we began by establishing a steering committee consisting of the Dean of Students and the Director of Student Life, who oversee most of the student life activity on campus, and the Chief of Staff, who represents the Office of the President. The initial work of the steering committee was twofold: to identify key areas of student life and then work with multiple campus stakeholders to furnish recommendations for each area.¹ Accordingly, the steering committee helped establish subcommittees that were asked to produce a white paper that researched and evaluated an assigned area of student life. Participation on the subcommittees was voluntary, but the steering committee made a deliberate attempt to include representation from all areas of the campus community. Faculty from each of the three schools, administrative faculty across departments, and students were all included in the initial phase of the process. The white papers were synthesized utilizing a gap analysis procedure to determine where we currently are, where we are going, and how we plan to get there. The key considerations and

¹ The committee identified areas through an examination of materials (e.g., website, available strategic plans) garnered from formal and informal peer and aspirational institutions.

recommendations from the initial white papers have been summarized in this document for review by executive leadership and other campus stakeholders.

Next Steps

The initial phase of the planning process aimed to establish a vehicle for additional campus dialogue that will move us towards a final strategic plan. The completion of this phase is marked by this executive summary, and the next steps in the process are detailed below.

- Align the timeline of this strategic plan with the institutional strategic planning process being led by the Office of the Provost.
- Engage the campus community on a broader scope: *(note: a lot of this got subsumed into the town halls for the over-arching strategic plan; however, we think there is still room for additional focus groups)*
 - Foster robust and inclusive opportunities for campus constituents to provide input (e.g., *Vision Boarding*, which places physical boards around campus that allow stakeholders to observe and contribute ideas).
 - Conduct focus groups to both gather additional information and prioritize current initiatives.
- Conduct additional research on best practices in student life engagement that may not have been fully examined via the white papers.
- Clearly delineate the resources needed to bridge the gap between objectives that may be largely attainable through existing financial resources (e.g., hire a Director of Wellness to work within an established facility) and those that are much more aspirational in nature (e.g., multi-million dollar project to build a Student Wellness Center).
- Pilot specific components of the student life expansion in the 2018-2019 academic year to prepare for the scaling up of services as residence halls open in the 2019-2020 academic year.

Summary of Major Findings

Three core themes emerged across the white papers: 1) A consistent commitment to service learning and civic engagement, 2) a call to expand services in nearly every functional area of student life, and 3) the recommendation to establish physical spaces that foster student life opportunities, preferably at the heart of campus.

Theme 1: Service Learning & Civic Engagement

Much of the literature on effective student life initiatives within higher education underscores the importance of service learning and civic engagement, particularly in regards to the development of student leaders (Sponsler and Hartley, 2013).² A commitment to these same principles was readily apparent in several of the white papers furnished by the strategic planning subcommittees, as charted in Table 1. The recurrence of these ideas across multiple white papers, coupled with the supporting evidence from the literature, suggests that service learning and civic

² “Service Learning” is being defined here as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students a) participate in an organized service activity that meets community needs and b) reflect on the experience in way that promotes other positive developmental outcomes (e.g., an enhanced sense of civic responsibility; Felten, P. et al., 2011).

engagement should be significant considerations in the development and implementation of our student life initiatives.

Table 1

Subcommittee	Example recommendations	
	Service Learning	Civic Engagement
Personal Development Subcommittee	Create a service learning center to develop programming and create opportunities for experiential/applied learning	Form a Social Justice Council to help shape student engagement in a meaningful way that promotes fairness to access and empowerment for the NSC Community
Academic Co-Curricular Subcommittee	Formalize support for and promotion of faculty-led service trips	Create more sustainable opportunities for student expression through media platforms (e.g., student newspaper) through connecting them to a course

Theme 2: Expansion of Services

As noted in the forthcoming summary of key findings from each white paper, every subcommittee called for the creation of new services or the expansion of existing services. For example, the wellness subcommittee called for an expansion of services with regard to mental health and wellness, which aligns with data suggesting that our current provision of support – while significantly improved in recent years – falls short of national averages and expert recommendations (Gallagher, 2015). Other recommendations for expansion included, but were not limited to, the extension of police services to 24/7 coverage and the hiring of a compliance officer to handle all Title IX and Conduct cases. Importantly, each of these recommendations strongly encouraged the campus to bolster these services prior to the advent of residence halls.

Theme 3: Physical Space

The third key finding was a call for additional space for student life oriented programs. These requests surfaced in reference to an array of topics, including a Women’s Center, recreation and fitness opportunities, a student lounge, and arts and culture development. The subcommittees did not provide details about how to create this space, but generally recommended housing as much of this space as possible in the heart of the campus to demonstrate that these services are a priority within our campus community. Finding physical space is undoubtedly a challenge, but we almost certainly will not be able to properly implement many of the attached recommendations – and establish a legitimate student life experience – without carving out places in which to do it. We recommend conducting additional research on the types of spaces that are most likely to help us recruit and retain committed students.

Key Findings from White Papers

Student Leadership Subcommittee

Finding: The Social Change Model of Leadership Development was identified as the most appropriate framework. This model explicitly promotes equity, social justice, and self-knowledge, and it conceptualizes leadership as a process, not a position. This creates an ideal scenario in which the framework can be applicable to the entire student body and remain consistent with our institutional mission.

Recommendation: Coupling this framework with the use of CAS Standards, we will create learning outcomes for each student life initiative and assess our achievements based on those outcomes over time. This assessment will ensure that we are following the plan set forth by this strategic plan as well as inform our progress and highlight essential areas for improvement.

Wellness Subcommittee

The Wellness Subcommittee looked into four major areas:

1. Women's Center

Finding: Sexual assault and harassment on college campuses is widespread, and reports suggest that only 20% of incidences are reported to leadership or authorities (Cantor et al., 2015; Sinozich & Langton, 2014; Spencer, Mallory, Toews, Stith & Wood, 2017; Sutton & Simmons, 2015; Weiser, 2017).

Recommendation: Create and staff a Women's Center to help foster a more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment on campus, and to provide primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention regarding the issues cited above.

2. Counseling and Support Services

Finding: National Survey of Counseling Center Directors data shows the national average of mental health professionals to students on college campus is 1:1600. NSC has made significant progress in the provision of these services, but our ratio is roughly 0.6:4200, based on a 3-days per week schedule of services (note: headcount or FTE here?).

Recommendation: Scale up our provision of counseling and support services, including the possibility of online therapy.

3. Recreation & Fitness

Finding: Physical wellness is a means of stress reduction (Samani & Heath, 2018; Spink & Carron, 1994).

Recommendation: Improve fitness center facilities (e.g., move to heart of campus, add locker rooms, provide group fitness classes).

Recommendation: Provide intramural and club sports activities (note: white paper also calls for efforts to establish NCAA teams).

4. Social Activity

Finding: “Place” matters and students need lounge space to develop a sense of belonging and promote student-driven activities.

Recommendation: Create a student lounge.

Personal Development Subcommittee

The Personal Development Subcommittee formulated findings and recommendations for three major areas:

1. Service Learning

Finding: Service learning is considered a best practice for promoting student development, particularly for nursing and education students.

Recommendation: Create and staff a service learning/civic engagement center and/or form a committee dedicated to providing these opportunities.

2. Diversity and Social Justice

Finding: Social Justice is at the core of our mission at Nevada State College.

Recommendation: Establish a Council on Social Justice to continue and expand social justice programming to ensure equity in access to opportunity and the empowerment of all NSC community members.

3. Arts & Culture

Finding: Provide more direct ways for students to engage with the arts as a means of developing self.

Recommendation: Create a black box theater that students can rent out and/or establish an enclosed student gallery space.

Academic Co-Curricular Subcommittee

Finding: Research suggests that student and residential life initiatives are most likely to improve student outcomes (e.g., retention; campus satisfaction) when they involve faculty and/or are integrated into the academic experience (Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). Consequently, the subcommittee provided recommendations for improving seven different areas of academic engagement.

Recommendation: Student Media Opportunities – Connect these opportunities (e.g., Scorpion’s Tale) to a class and transition to digital delivery.

Recommendation: Create “learning communities” of students who enroll in multiple courses as a single cohort and engage in shared learning and community-building activities (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Recommendation: Faculty-Led Service Trips – Provide increased support for promotion, funding, and administrative duties.

Recommendation: Special Projects – Work to develop a space for innovation labs and emerging technologies.

Recommendation: Study Abroad – Centralize administration and promotion; rely on consultant recommendations.

Recommendation: Internships – Centralize under Career Services while coordinating with the individual schools on campus.

Recommendation: Mentoring – Create a statement/policy regarding an official mentoring program at the college; incentivize faculty to engage in more mentoring relationships.

Recommendation: Honor Societies – Provide institutional support to research and identify honor societies we can bring to campus; secure funding for students who are eligible to join but cannot afford the registration fees.

Greek Life Subcommittee

Finding: The Greek Life Subcommittee projected that 5 to 10 percent of our student body would affiliate with Greek letter organizations if given the opportunity.

Recommendation: Hire a full-time coordinator to focus solely on building a Greek life program; aim is to be proactive in building Greek life opportunities strategically as opposed to reacting to organic student life developments on campus

Conduct/Police Services/Title IX

The Conduct/Police Services/Title IX Subcommittee recommendations are almost exclusively tied to the opening of residence halls on campus.

Recommendation: Hire a compliance officer to expand Title IX training as a preventative measure as well as respond to the increased Title IX and Conduct cases resulting from students living on campus.

Recommendation: Extend hours of police services to 24/7 to ensure campus safety

Resource Needs

The following summary of resource needs is not a full reflection of the subcommittee recommendations. After reviewing and synthesizing the white papers, the steering committee determined that the resource burden on the college could be lessened by consolidating multiple initiatives under a fewer number of staff members than were originally requested. However, a full list of the positions requested will be provided to college leadership in the event that the consolidation is deemed to be unwarranted.

Personnel Needs

To cultivate a high-quality student life experience and successfully implement the major recommendations presented in this summary, four additional positions are recommended. The new lines would include three additional administrative faculty positions and one additional classified staff position, as detailed below. The budget impact of each position is delineated in the forthcoming section on “Budget Needs.”

- *Director of Wellness:* This position would take over as the CARE Team Lead and serve as the Director of the Women’s Center.
- *Compliance Officer:* This position would handle the development of Title IX training and manage all Title IX and conduct cases.
- *Manager of Student Life:* This position would support all Student Life initiatives with primary responsibility over social justice programming, Greek life, and service learning.
- *Administrative Assistant:* This position would provide administrative support to all staff under the purview of the Dean of Students.

Budget Needs

The following budgeting needs are in addition to the \$24,855 operating budget allocated to Student Life in the FY19 budget. Importantly, this list does not include major capital investments and facility costs that would be incurred by the creation or renovation of space for student life needs. Furthermore, this number is for the first year of implementation; over time, the operating needs are expected to grow along with increasing student enrollment and initiatives.

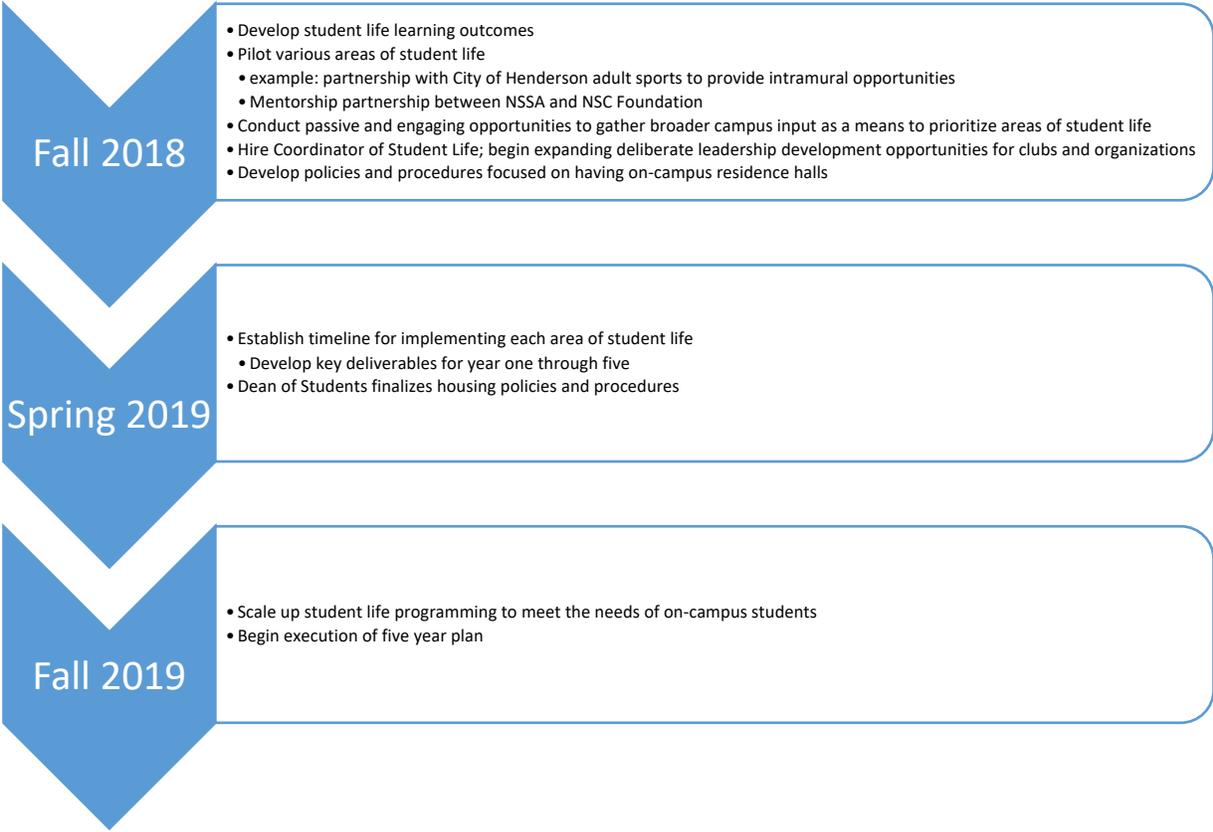
Table 2

Title	Description	Amount
Professional Development Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 professional development opportunity for each administrative faculty member (6) • 1 additional professional development opportunity for each director (2) • Professional development stipend for <i>faculty in residence</i> program (3 stipends each fall and spring) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18,000 (6*3,000) • 6,000 (2*3,000) • 15,000 (6*2,500)

Director of Wellness	See “Personnel Needs”	\$79,800 (salary + benefits)
Compliance Officer	See “Personnel Needs”	\$66,500 (salary + benefits)
Manager of Student Life	See “Personnel Needs”	\$66,500 (salary + benefits)
Administrative Assistant	See “Personnel Needs”	\$46,500 (salary + benefits)
	Total Budget for Personnel	298,300

Proposed Timeline

The below diagram is a proposed timeline of next steps



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