

Program Review Department Response Report

Office of The Dean of Students

Division of Student Affairs

January 2022

**Introduction**

The purpose of program review is to improve the quality of departments, division, and the institution as a whole. The review provides each department an opportunity to reflect, self-assess, and plan for the future. The process facilitates in-depth communication between the department and senior leadership and informs future planning and decision-making. By stimulating department or program planning and encouraging department-based strategic planning, the program review process can advance OHIO’s overall mission.

Program review in the Division of Student Affairs (DOSA) at Ohio University emphasizes:

* Involvement of all department staff to accurately portray the varied experiences of the department across all stages of organizational membership and function.
* Collaboration within and across the OHIO community to craft a reflective self-study review, including applicable data and information
* Conversations about the future of the department with DOSA leadership, emphasizing improvement, planning, decision-making, and resource allocation

Program reviews aim to generate a sense of shared purpose and connection to the campus mission and reinforce the need for coordinated planning for the future. In doing so, the program review process intentionally involves several key stakeholders:

* Staff, faculty, students, and other stakeholders undergoing review: this provides an opportunity for those directly involved in the department to assess its strengths and areas for improvement
* The involvement of the Dean, Assistant or Associate Dean of Students, VPSA, campus leadership, and administrators ensures that meaningful and effective follow-up for each review will occur
* The involvement of staff or faculty from other units on campus: promotes campus-wide understanding of the contributions of each department to the mission of the institution
* The involvement of program reviewers from the same line of work: offers peer review and input on strengthening the department’s purpose, reputation, and future direction

**Committee Composition**

The external review team was composed of two non-Ohio University affiliated reviewers from other institutions with expertise in the work of a Dean of Students office, case management, and critical incident response, one internal reviewer from another department, and a closely connected community member.

**Timeline**

The self-study was written in 2020. Due to COVID-19 the review was delayed until June 2021, when it was held online via Microsoft Teams. August 2021 DOSA received the report from the committee which is available online or can be obtained by contacting the office of the Vice President for Student Affairs.  September 2021 staff met to debrief the report and worked throughout the month to develop a response and action plan informed by the review and reviewers’ report.

**Summary of Reviewers Report**

After the digital visit, the review team collaborated to produce a written report summarizing the strengths of the department and recommending changes where appropriate. The reviewers also addressed questions posed by the department in the self-study and digital visit. The bullets below summarize the key findings.

## *Themes of Excellence*

The self-study and virtual visit revealed consistent appreciation for the DoS staff as professionals, their approach to working with each other and campus partners, and the value of some specific programs and services associated with the office. The following themes were most notably indicative of excellence:

* Relationships with campus partners
* Longevity of staff provides continuity and institutional knowledge
* Identified by stakeholders as central to Ohio University
* Well-respected and positive view of the Dean of Students office by stakeholders and constituents with whom the office is currently connected.
* Specific functions of the DoS office were identified as working well to achieve their individual goals, namely Bobcats Helping Bobcats, crisis response, and SRCC.

## *Themes of Opportunity/Aspirations*

The self-study and virtual visit highlighted opportunities for long-term restructuring and strategic alignment of roles and responsibilities in light of current interim roles and shifting portfolios. This was further supported by the interviews/listening sessions where the following themes became evident:

* The organizational structure is confusing, unclear, illogical, and in places, creates unnecessary risk to the University.
* Roles of individuals would benefit from being more clearly defined and determined by program area/function rather than by the specific individual.
* Some programs and services could be better served if realigned outside of the DoS office and would increase opportunities for DoS staffing refocus on the departmental mission and stronger connection and assessment of direct student needs.
* Strategic, proactive, and collaborative programming would support a more flexible, nimble infrastructure by reducing reactivity and engaging resources.
* Case management assessment and record-keeping needs a comprehensive and inclusive approach that extends beyond SRCC cases. Determining what is elevated to a case, beginning a case file, reporting on those cases, and assessing the case management work was not clear.
* Further communication and clarity about the office and how it serves its constituents is a high priority as there was a consistent lack of awareness and understanding about the work of the office among the student body.
* The mission statement does not capture the work of the office.
* Inadequate staffing for workload and scope of the office is too broad. Current staffing also lacks diversity.
* It was mentioned several times that the DoS Office has moved more toward a reactive approach to crisis management.
* DoS Office is perceived by both students and staff as being represented by as a person (Jenny Hall-Jones), rather than a team.
* They observed a lack of strategic planning for the office, especially when absorbing new areas of work (parent programs, basic needs, e.g.).
* Specific tangible examples of D&I work was not mentioned in many conversations, or at least not tied directly back to the D&I priorities of the institution; some concerns about the make-up of the office not being reflective of the overall student body in regard to identity.

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| **Report  chapter** | **Proposed areas for future focus** | **Strengths** |
| **Section I: Response to self-study** | While the self-study outlined staff roles and their individual goals (including information about graduate assistants/student workers), no information was included that referenced Mark Ferguson. His role, relationship to the office, and goals for the upcoming year related to DoS objectives were not included in the self-study. Additionally, no explanation was provided about his involvement in the office or the DoS office’s engagement in the wellness efforts for the division.    The self-study also did not include in-depth information about certain DoS program areas such as parent programs or survivor advocacy programs. Both of these program areas came up in conversations with staff members but were not evident in the self-study; therefore, committee members did not have context for these discussions nor was the committee prepared with follow-up questions when these program areas were identified during virtual interviews. | The strength of the self-study was the level of detail provided about the current structure and relationships of interim roles to current functions. Of particular benefit was inclusion of information about the history of the office and the decisions that were made previously that contributed to the current organizational structure, roles, and responsibilities. |
| **Section II: Response to on-campus visit** | The committee found that the virtual visits were frequently too short to accommodate detailed comments and follow-up with attendees who wished to participate. The amount of time dedicated for meetings with stakeholders were typically 30 minutes, frequently scheduled without a break in between. This limited discussion offered little flexibility in exploring topics in more depth, and did not allow time for the committee to debrief or regroup before the next meeting. To maximize the opportunity for review, the committee recommends a minimum of 45 minutes per meeting with 15 minutes in between each meeting and extending visits into a third day if necessary.  The timing of the visits also presented some challenges as they conflicted with the end of the fiscal year resulting in important stakeholders taking vacation time to reduce a loss of banked hours. This resulted in some meetings that had very sparse attendance (one student speaking on behalf of 10 invitees who could not attend, e.g.). Additionally, there were some notable groups who were not included in the virtual visits such as staff from the Survivor Advocacy Program or students who were not directly connected with the DoS office as graduate assistants, student workers, or program participants.    Finally, it was apparent that some groups did not understand the purpose of the meeting or the feedback they were being asked to provide. The review committee had to provide context and a cursory overview of the external review process, which may have unintentionally excluded important information better shared by Ohio University staff members, for adequate context and framing. It would be helpful, in the future, for each group to have a more comprehensive understanding of the review process, why they were invited in particular to these discussions, why their contributions were important, and what they were being asked to share on behalf of their constituent | The virtual visits highlighted the  support and investment of stakeholders in the continued success of the Dean of Students office. The Teams meeting platform worked effectively to conduct the visits and no technical difficulties were encountered. Stakeholders and constituents who were able to attend were interested in contributing their thoughts and engaging in discussion. The visits provided the most rich information from which this report developed. |
| **Section III: Response to departmental questions** | Some proposed questions were either repetitive or did not warrant being asked of a particular group, based on what they were sharing and the direction of the interview once the meeting commenced. (In other words, it was clear that there was information that some individuals wanted to share while they had the opportunity, that was not necessarily directly responsive to the proposed self-study questions.) | The interview questions and listening sessions around gathering information pursuant to these questions. As such, responses are captured throughout the report, specifically in the identification of strengths, opportunities, and in the recommendations.    While the proposed questions provided helpful framing for the discussions with each group and highlighted particular areas to focus on, the committee also developed their own questions in advance of and throughout the interviews. This was an iterative process as more information was shared by meeting participants; new and interesting information from earlier interviews was used to inform later sessions. There were some areas and information that the review committee felt committee designed their  were important to explore further that were not included in the proposed self-study questions but that came up during interviews and warranted additional discussion. |
| **Section IV: Conclusion** | Strategic development in some particular areas could advance the Dean of Students Office into the next period of growth and expansion of services. The office suffers, like much of higher education today, from a lack of adequate staffing, staff members playing multiple roles (and often more than one person could reasonably do), and fulfillment of critical positions by interim appointments, out of necessity. While the interim and fluid nature of the current organizational structure presents challenges, it can also be seen as an opportunity to step back and take a critical look at the structure of the organization, function and role of staff members, strategic areas of focus, and historical systems that may no longer be effective in the current environment. This critical look could reveal areas of possible realignment, supervision adjustments, programmatic changes, and strengthening of existing practices that could evolve the work of the Dean of Students Office. Honest assessment of these critical areas, supplemented by the recommendations made by this external review team, is the first step to advancing the mission of the Dean of Students Office, and continuing to serve students in the most effective way possible. | The Dean of Students Office at Ohio University plays a very important and central role at the University. The office and its staff members are well respected by constituents from all areas of the university, including campus partners, students, staff members, divisional leadership, and community members. The ability of staff members to build and sustain critical relationships across campus, in support of students and their current needs and in response to crises that occur regularly, is to be commended. |

**Recommended follow up actions:**

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| 1. Strategically re-imagine the DoS office organizational structure and establish clear work portfolios for staff members. |
| 1. Move the leadership of the MBSP to another department or into an academic unit |
| 1. Continue high level oversight of the Bobcats Helping Bobcats Program but develop more robust tracking and assessment of the program’s impact and effectiveness. |
| 1. Transfer supervision of the functional and operational aspects of the Bobcats Helping Bobcats Program to the Executive Director of Well-Being and Rec Sports as part of a financial wellness portfolio. Transfer stocking of the Cat’s Cupboard to Culinary Services. |
| 1. Counseling and Psychological Services should have a direct supervisory relationship with the Dean of Students and provide oversight to the Survivor Advocacy Program rather than the Assistant or Associate Dean of Students position. |
| 1. Create a case manager position for the day-to-day operations, triage, and assignment of all case management including critical incidents. |
| 1. Create formalized training process and guidelines for on-call responsibilities and incorporate additional staff. It would be recommended that the Director for Community Standards be added to the rotation as well as the Director for Fraternity and Sorority Life. |
| 1. Partner with the International Student Service Office to better streamline and support international students who represent a significant group being served by Cats Cupboard. |
| 1. Consider all contacts with the DoS office as cases and document them accordingly in Maxient. Develop a coordinated, proactive plan for assessment and reporting. |
| 1. Facilitate a stronger and clearer understanding of the role of the DoS office among stakeholders and constituents through ongoing marketing, communication, outreach, and education. |

**Department Response to Reviewers Report**

The Director of Strategic Planning and Assessment convened a follow-up meeting with the interim SAVP and Dean of Students, interim Associate Dean of Students, interim Vice President of Student Affairs and VP’s Chief of Staff in September 2021. This meeting facilitated a group discussion of the review team’s report. After the follow-up meeting, the department drafted this report, which was later approved by the Director of Strategic Planning and Assessment.

Items that most resonated with the Office of the Dean of Students from the report:

* The function and organization of the office is confusing to those outside of the institution
* DoS Office is perceived by both students and staff as being represented by as a person (Jenny Hall-Jones), rather than a team
* Track more cases in Maxient and give thought to what incidents should be tracked – family member death, parent loss of job, additional, insightful/impactful information that could be filed related to a student
* Re-imagine DOS office – primary and secondary functions
* Better highlight the D&I work that is being done and how it is integrated into our day-to-day functions.

The Office of the Dean of Students disagrees with a few of the reviewers’ comments and recommendations.

* We think that the current mission does fit the work of the Office
* Overall, we suspect that low attendance might have limited the strength of findings and recommendations
* Some think the Office of the Dean of Students is different than the role of the SAVP, so comments on organizational structure are noted with caution and need for more thought, investigation and conversation.
* We disagree with the reviewers recommendation that CPS needs to have direct supervisory relationship with the Dean of Students. Because of our divisional focus on wellbeing, this model is being explored and tested as we take a creative approach to addressing the holistic wellbeing of students. We recommend that this structure continue to exist until we can in good faith review its effectiveness in a non-COVID-19 environment.
* While the reviewers recommended making every phone call into a case the reality is that the time burden. It takes about 30 minutes to create a case in Maxient. Making every phone call into case is time prohibitive currently. While we do agree that more of the work done by the Office of the Dean of Students could be tracked, we intent to reevaluate and determine a more standard definition of what a case is as a part of the action item, “Strategize Case Management Functions” as indicated below.

Actions have already taken place since the review and receipt of the report. In response to this process, we would like to propose the following goals, timelines for completion and metrics to measure progress and success in the table below.

**Departmental Action Plan: September 2021- June 2022**

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| Item / action | Who is responsible? | What are the barriers to implementation? | What are the next steps | What are the needs/costs for this to succeed? | Who are key partners? |
| Develop an office communication/marketing strategy that will better publicize the functions and people in the office. Refresh web and any hard copy documents (e.g. folders) | All DOS staff + SACM | None known | Schedule planning meeting; once permanent dean of students is in place | Collaboration with SACM | SACM |
| Set strategic plan for the office . DoS meet with SPA to prepare for an all DoS staff half-day summer retreat to determine priorities for a multi-year strategic plan. | All DOS staff + | Permanent staff in place | Fill interim/vacant positions; once permanent dean of students is in place | Need: Time! | SPA |
| Strategize case management functions – defining what constitutes a case; determining how best to distribute cases of specific areas and complexity | Kathy/Chad | Capacity/time | Schedule planning meeting once permanent dean of students is in place | Time! | DOS staff |
| Clarify the organizational structure and communicate accordingly. Related to #1, address and examine who reports to the SAVP, who is on call, and titling distinctions between asst dean of students in the office and beyond | DOS | Interim position | Fill DOS, start fall 2022 | Strategic planning | VPSA |
| Publicize and amplify the tangible D&I work (including basic needs, mental health). Related to #1, develop a plan that builds more common knowledge of how ODOS has embedded D&I into operations | Kathy/SACM | None known | Incorporate into our impact reports/marketing strategy; strategic plan and check-in with D&I’s | Time! | SACM |
| Assessment and outcome data of our processes. Consider evaluation of a) the breadth of scope of students who come to and interact with ODOS resources and services; b) function of SRCC as a referral source; c) quality of services as perceived by users and partners; d) measurement of service provided to OHIO community – those who make referrals | Chad | Capacity | Incorporate into the strategic plan for ODOS. | Time! | SPA, evaluator from Patton, potentially a sociologist |