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Team 4 VCU: Ram Resources: Helping Faculty Help Students

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RAM RESOURCES: HELPING FACULTY HELP STUDENTS

TEAM MEMBERS

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Project Sponsor: Linda Hancock, Clinician and Director, The Wellness Resource Center

PROJECT ABSTRACT

The Ram Resources Project seeks to provide students with an environment that encourages their well-being by connecting them with resources needed to succeed in their academic career at VCU. Ram Resources will help reduce the detrimental impact of the number-one problem affecting students' academic performance: stress. Faculty are uniquely situated both to recognize changes in students' behavior and to assist students with improving their well-being. Beginning with New Faculty Orientation, Ram Resources will educate faculty about resources for well-being available to students. By creating a brochure, a website, and establishing a program of faculty ambassadors to familiarize faculty with the resources available to identify the warning signs of stress, the team proposes to help faculty help students.

QUEST FOR DISTINCTION

Theme I

Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment

Goal/Metric:

1. Recruit and retain talented and diverse students who will graduate at a higher rate than our Quest peers and serve as leaders in a well-educated workforce.
- b. Strengthen programs / initiatives that support access, reduce student debt, increase internal financial assistance, and speed timely graduation

Ram Resources seeks to connect struggling students with the resources needed to succeed in their academic career at VCU. The team believes that by educating faculty on the resources available and the warning signs of stress, Ram Resources can help reduce the impact of the number-one issue affecting student academic performance.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Increase faculty awareness of resources available to students.
2. Reduce student stress, and improve student well-being.
3. Develop faculty to better identify and respond to students in need of assistance with stress and well-being issues.
4. Increase student use of resources designed to help them cope with stress.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

Ram Resources pursues a strategic reduction in student academic stress-related issues through a long-term approach that consistently connects students to resources for coping with stress. In order to establish a long-lasting and sustainable solution, Ram Resources looks to raising VCU faculty awareness as a crucial step. Faculty remain at VCU for longer than a typical four-year

enrollment-and-graduation cycle. Faculty work with students year after year and may recognize patterns that help them to identify struggling students. As the primary contact between students and VCU, faculty are specifically required by the Provost to address issues of stress in students.

ACTION STEPS

- Conducted primary and secondary research to determine what was impacting student well-being and academic success
- Brainstormed possible solutions to effect change
- Audited and curated existing resources available at VCU
- Discussed issues about student well-being with students from the VCU Emerging Leadership Program (ELP).
- Secured sponsor by engaging in discussions with Dr. Linda Hancock and engaging in a dialogue of the best approach to help students
- Engaged a convenience sample to discuss faculty helping students on well-being issues
- Partnered with Dr. Enoch Hale by being scheduled for a workshop at New Faculty Orientation
- Developed a catalogue of resources available to students at VCU
- Designed and developed a website to showcase in one location all resources available to students
- Designed and developed a brochure highlighting the core resources for students to disseminate to new faculty at the New Faculty Orientation Workshop
- Developed a New Faculty Orientation Workshop focused on highlighting the issue of student well-being and the opportunities faculty have to identify and provide guidance to students
- Surveyed attendees of the New Faculty Orientation Workshop to gather barrier data from faculty and evaluate effectiveness of the workshop

OUTCOMES

Outcomes can be categorized as short term, mid-term or long term relative to a change agent. The team considers the products and the effect of the project to have short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes. Short-term outputs include the brochure that was created and distributed at the new faculty orientation and the New Faculty Orientation Workshop. The Ram Resources website is a mid-term output that now requires some additional resources in order to appropriately house and maintain. The team anticipates a Faculty Ambassador Program, as a long-term product output, which is envisioned as a training program for which faculty members volunteer to become their departments' ambassadors. Participation in this program would be formally considered as service to the University. The volunteer faculty member would be trained on counseling techniques such as motivational interviewing and would serve as the point of contact for their department if additional assistance were needed from faculty. The team envisions this to be a certificate program that would require training each year. The volunteer ambassadors would also help lead training and seminars, and conduct the New Faculty Orientation workshop yearly.

The effects of the team's products can also be viewed as having short-term, mid-term and long-term effects. The short-term effect is that new faculty perceive VCU as providing a supportive culture for our students. As a mid-term effect, faculty become more confident and versed in the resources available to students at VCU, and how best to direct students to the resources that will help them in their time of need. The long-term effect is to decrease students' stress levels while increasing their use of resources, retention, and satisfaction with their experience at VCU.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability requires not only identifying key stakeholders, but also engaging in certain processes to support sustainability. Critical stakeholders are the University President, Provost, and Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs. These individuals are strategically positioned to support this effort because of it is aligned with the University strategic plan and, more importantly, targeted to improve students' well-being by helping them manage stress. Additional stakeholders that would improve sustainability are the primary student resources (e.g., The Well, University Counseling, and Student Health Services). Leaders of these resources are also identified as critical stakeholders. In addition, the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence is a key stakeholder, given that its mission is to enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning through faculty development.

In addition to the stakeholders identified, four specific processes should be implemented to increase likelihood of the sustainability of this program. First, "documenting success, disseminating the evidence to stakeholders, and advertising to the general public" (i.e., VCU at large and Richmond City community) are predictors of a project's sustainability (Mancini & Marek, 2004; Magis, 2010; Stephen, Bekemeier, & Berkowitz, 2005). Second, funding for the proposed initiative should be dispersed across several units/sources. "Multiple sources of funding" improve a project's sustainability (Light, 1998). Third, a "project's ability to change from the initial plan" and to assess readiness for change of the constituents improves sustainability (Schneider et al., 1996; Jones et al., 2005). Lastly, ensuring an "ongoing project evaluation plan" is critical to the sustainability of any initiative. An evaluation plan not only ensures that the project is aligned with the necessary resources to implement the initiative, but also facilitates analysis of the program's effectiveness (Johnson, et al., 2004; Scheirer, 2005).

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The project promotes usage of resources that already exist within the University and therefore requires minimal financing. The main investment is the time and effort dedicated by the faculty for the sustainability and success of this project. If housed within the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, the project may require a contact person, who would need to dedicate time. In the 2-5 year plan, each school would have one or more trained faculty members who serve as Ambassadors. This role requires participating faculty to dedicate additional time.

Project Budget

Item Description	Justification	Cost
Web maintenance and brochure printing	Resources support	\$25,000
Trainers for Faculty Ambassadors and New Faculty Orientation (professional development funds)	Service for faculty (\$2,500 per trainer, 10 trainers, per year, every 3 year cost)	\$25,000
Faculty Ambassadors (professional development funds)	Service for faculty (\$2,500 per faculty, per year, estimating 20 across the university)	\$50,000
Faulty Learning Community (FLC) stipends	Support for faculty serving on FLC, 10 faculty per FLC, maximum of 2 FLCs if necessary	\$50,000
	Total	\$150,000

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ram Resources has four recommendations as next steps for the project to present to stakeholders:

1. Consider the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) as a suitable project home given its mission of faculty development;
2. Develop a CTLE Faculty Learning Community (FLC) tasked with evolving the proposed initiative, this FLC may include faculty from the CTLE and members of the original Ram Resources team;
3. Work with University Relations to develop the Ram Resources website for branding and for optimizing user experience; and
4. Provide stipends to faculty in the FLC to develop ideas and ensure the sustainability of the project.

FINAL PITCH

In recent years, both the demographics of college students and the higher-education environment have changed significantly. Consequently, students face many personal stressors, and these have multiplied.

Stress has been consistently identified as the primary issue affecting VCU student academic performance, as confirmed by our Wellness Resource Center's most recent health survey (Spring 2016, n=856). The detriments of students' stress impair VCU's vision to "be a premier urban, public research university distinguished by its commitment to the intellectual and academic success of a diverse student body." Ram Resources seeks to make this vision a reality by empowering faculty to recognize warning signs in students suffering from stress and to connect those students with the already extensive resources available on campus for managing stress. . By empowering faculty with information that enables students to get the education they came for, Ram Resources aims to help faculty help students.

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Appendix 1: Survey of participants at New Faculty Orientation, August 23, 2017



Instructions: Please provide us with some information to better understand what new faculty at VCU think about helping students during stressful times. Data is anonymous and will only be used for improvement of the resources under development.

As a graduate student or faculty member at your previous institution...

1. Did you ever provide assistance to a student who was having trouble managing their stress levels?

NO YES

2. Did you feel that you had the adequate resources when helping a student manage stress?

NO YES N/A

3. Do you expect in the next year you will have to interact with a student who is suffering in terms of their emotional well-being?

NO YES DON'T KNOW

Now think about the role you are coming into here at Virginia Commonwealth University...

4. What are the barriers that might keep you from helping students manage their stress? Check all that apply.

- I don't have enough time to help students
 - I don't feel like I have the ability to help students
 - I'm uncertain how to handle situations when students ask for help
 - I don't feel comfortable talking to students about sensitive topic areas
 - I don't want to interfere
 - I am afraid the student will tell me to mind my own business
 - I don't think students want to seek professional help via university resources
 - Other barrier not listed:
-

Please use the 5-point Likert scale to respond to the following statements:

5. The presentation highlighting the resources available to me at VCU was helpful.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

6. I would recommend this presentation to my colleagues.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

7. Please provide any other comments that would be useful to the development of the resources presented to you.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS!

Appendix 2. Logic Model of the Ram Resources Program

