Student Support Services Annual Report 2016-2017

prepared by Timothy Shiner, Associate Dean & Director

Introduction:

The office of Student Support Services provides support for students experiencing any number of crises and/or challenging life situations. We provide a compassionate and non-judgmental sounding board, help connect students to a network of resources, and work with them to explore options and take actions to work through and learn from these experiences. Much of our work is one-on-one with students, but it also involves significant coordination with campus partners, work with families, faculty, and student peers. We manage the Administrator on Call system, address community concerns for student well-being including holding a weekly Students of Concern meeting, and serve as a triage hub for student issues.

2016-2017 was a year of significant transition where the changing landscape of our department, the division, and the university resulted in numerous improvements to protocols and systems. However, there is significant work still to be done in these areas, as well as in moving our work to the next level of student support, reducing barriers to service through improved outreach, and building stronger and more collaborative campus partner relationships.

2016-2017 Student Support Services Staff	
June Drinkwater	Coordinator
Cynthia Ellis	Associate Dean
Andrés Fernández	Assistant Dean
Mary Greineder	Assistant Dean
Christine Rugg	Administrative Coordinator
Timothy Shiner	Associate Dean & Director

Significant Accomplishments:

- 2016-2017 was a year of significant transition in the office of Student Support Services. This year, two new staff members joined the team, including a new assistant dean and an interim director, who was named director after a national search. The continuing team did an excellent job training and mentoring the new staff. These changes also created opportunities to look at office processes and procedures in new ways.

- SSS Staff supported 2072 unique students this year. Greensheets, our record system, shows 5802 contacts with these students. Numerous cases were complex and layered, requiring sensitivity, careful collaboration with campus partners, and ongoing follow up with the students and, in some cases, their families. It is important to note that a lack of formal protocol on documentation means this data does not fully capture our work. Especially early in the year, staff entered differing degrees of detail and levels of interactions in Greensheets. We are moving toward a more consistent and clearly articulated documentation system. The most common topics about which students saw us were academic concerns, illness/injury, and personal concerns (which are often mental health related). More detailed information on our contacts can be found in the Appendix: Table 1; Charts 1-2.

- With the departure of a fixed term case manager in spring 2016, the work being done by that position shifted to other staff. Of particular note was the work of concussion tracking and processing of FluWeb submissions (ill students notify us of their illness and we follow up to assure they have care, academic support, and food). Information on improved concussion protocols is discussed below, but it's important to note that the tracking of these cases fell to our Coordinator as a new responsibility. The FluWeb work has been taken on by our Administrative Coordinator in addition to her other responsibilities. Information on these numbers can be found in the Appendix: Chart 5 and Table 1 respectively.

- Significant time and effort has been spent on engaging with students and planning for near-future improvements to the Medical Leave of Absence and Readmission processes. Detailed data on the number of leaves and readmissions can be found in the Appendix: Tables 2-4; Charts 3-4.
    - Responding to student feedback on the impersonal nature of the process, a blog was created to share personal narratives of students' and parents' experience with medical leaves, to put a more compassionate tone to the medical leave process, and to answer common questions and misconceptions about the process.
    - Staff worked with the Curricular Resource Center leavetaking coordinators to create an FAQ document and a checklist of expectations and responsibilities that can be shared with students as they consider taking a leave.
    - Improvements were made with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and University Health Services (UHS) to streamline the readmission process and make sure student documentation for the process is handled appropriately.

    - Stakeholders meetings with campus partners have been held to create a document of sticking points and improvements which can inform the external review and guide our future improvements to the process.
    - The readmission appeals process was revised to create a more fair, impartial and clear process for students.

- Policies and protocols related to supporting concussed students were completed reviewed and improved. Working with stakeholders in campus partner offices in an ongoing way, staff continually tweaked and improved our processes to provide seamless care and support to these students. Information on the number of concussion cases supported can be found in the Appendix: Chart 5

- In collaboration with colleagues in Residential Life, the Administrator on Call (AOC) protocols were completely re-written and updated. This has not been done in a systematic way in several years. Appropriate stakeholders were engaged in the process for specific protocols. New protocols were added for academic concerns, concerns about a faculty or staff person, death of a recent alumni, verification of student status related to international travel, emergency procedures for GELT students, and loss of off campus building or apartment. Training was provided to all AOC team members on new and changed policies and ongoing training was provided to the team as well. The most common topics about which students saw us were academic concerns, illness/injury, and personal concerns (which are often mental health related). The AOC team fielded over 600 calls this year with the most common calls concerning physical health, standard DPS shift change calls, and mental health concerns. More detailed information on our contacts can be found in the Appendix: Table 5; Chart 6.

- During this year of transition, significant effort was given to staff development. A staff retreat was held prior to the start of the fall semester, monthly professional development lunches were held with the whole team to discuss topics of diversity and inclusion, and staff were encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities both on and off campus.

- Significant progress was made both in the writing of and early implementation of action items from our Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). A final draft of our DIAP will be completed this summer but several action items have already been completed or are in process including the gathering of additional student input and the beginning of concerted efforts to forge stronger relationships with identity based centers on campus.

- Significant progress was also made on a departmental self-study. The self-study will be followed by an external review this summer which will inform policies and practices moving forward.

- A survey and data analysis of students served by our office was conducted. Every student who had contact with SSS in the past two years was surveyed and the data was used to inform both the DIAP and self-study work. In addition, staff worked with the office of Institutional Research to pull data on leavetaking historically, and by demographics, to further inform the impact of our recent and current policies on students. A separate report was generated analyzing this data.

Critical Priorities:

Medical Leave of Absence and Readmission (MLOA):
The MLOA process remains one about which students express concern. There are real issues that need to be addressed, as well as a narrative from past concerns which persists. Specifically, concerns are that the process is weighted toward protecting the university rather than caring for the student; that students will be forced on MLOA if they engage in any level of concerning behavior; and that students will be prevented from being readmitted when they are ready to return.

As noted above, through the blog, work with student partners, data collection, and work with campus stakeholders, a number of efforts were made to inform future changes and educate students on the reality of the process. There were no involuntary leaves this year and, of the 66 students who applied for readmission, only two were denied admission. One of these two students appealed the decision and his appeal was granted (see Appendix: Table 3).

A further layer of complication exists for graduate students both at the time of leavetaking and readmission. Separate expectations from the Graduate School, student's home department, and our MLOA guidelines create tensions and confusion and, in some instance, coordination between these areas has been strained. A more streamlined and student friendly process needs to be considered for graduate students.

This summer we will be working with campus partners:

i. to make decisions on terminology related to the process (for example, changing the name of application for readmission to petition for clearance),
ii. to rewrite guideline documents and letter templates to be more transparent and compassionate,
iii. to consider the frequency with which we review readmission applications to make the process more accessible to students.

Work will continue into the coming academic year and beyond to change the student perception and narrative about MLOA to one which is focused on student wellbeing and setting students up to succeed at Brown, while carefully balancing the impacts of community disruption.

Campus Partner Relationships:
With the significant transitions, not only in SSS, but also across the division of Campus Life and

the university, our many campus partner relationships need to be nurtured. Both interpersonal relationships, as well as the boundaries between roles and responsibilities, and the policies and processes which guide workflow between areas must be considered. Relationships with CAPS, UHS, Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS), the Title IX office, Residential Life, Athletics, the office of the Dean of the College, and the Graduate School all must receive attention. At this time, priority needs to be given to CAPS and the Graduate School.

With the creation of a new Associate Dean for Student Support role within the Graduate School, the year started with significant confusion as to how that role would interact with our office. Protocols were drafted in September and reviewed periodically to try to create clarity and the best possible service for graduate students. Systems seem to work best when the roles and responsibilities are very clearly delineated and/or when one office is handling all aspects of a situation. The most challenging issues have been in relation to graduate student medical leaves. Conversations on whether the Graduate School should handle all aspects of the process for their students have been broached, but a decision was made to maintain current practices through the end of this year. If the status quo is maintained moving forward, it is critical that the information and expectations set at the time of leavetaking match the expectations upon petition for clearance to return. Further informed by the outcome of our external review, conversations with the Graduate School staff should continue to make decisions on how to move forward.

CAPS is a department which has had significant transition, including in leadership, in the past year as well. The models with which they do their work have shifted and many new programs have been implemented. Our offices must work together to make sure our respective staffs understand the roles of the other office and that our policies and processes fit in a complimentary and seamless way to support students. The directors of the two offices have met to set a summer agenda which includes:

I. the development of new protocols for hospitalization and post-hospitalization,
II. a look at the ways in which our offices refer back and forth, including mandated assessments
III. a look at the places in which our offices work together for the MLOA process,
IV. and relationship building between staffs.

Conversations with leadership in the other partner offices are important as well and need to be tended to in the coming year and beyond. As a new Title IX Officer joins the Brown community, that relationship will also be a priority.

Office Protocols, Process and Systems

While a long-term view is required, a number of other office protocols, processes, and systems need to be reviewed. Many of the regular processes for which we are responsible are either not documented at all, or documentation is many years old. For instance, the Administrator on Call protocols had not been thoroughly reviewed in several years and are now up to date. The immediate priorities include:

I. Parental notification: no written protocol exists. We are currently benchmarking our peer institutions and plan to draft and implement a protocol this summer.
II. Hospitalization and post-hospitalization: while a process has been maintained, no documented protocol exists. As noted, we are working with CAPS to develop one. We are also benchmarking what our peer institutions do in this regard and plan to have a protocol in place by the end of the summer.
III. Record keeping: we currently use the university's Greensheets system as our primary record keeping system which is supplemented by a paper file system. Our paper files have not been cleaned out in many years and that must be done this summer. We also wish to minimize our paper files moving forward. We have worked with CIS to identify improvements to the ASK system which would allow us to retire Greensheets. A move to a more robust system would allow for better record-keeping, more granularity in security, better reporting functionality, and more modern workflow. We need to continue to work with CIS to move this project along, as well as with colleagues in campus partner offices to assure the system works well for all who need to interact with it.

Outreach to Student Communities

In general, outreach efforts from Student Support Services have been minimal over the past few years. Our website is out of date, we do a handful of presentations by request each year, and the volume of student need prevents us from engaging in outreach activities much of the time.

This summer, we hope to create a new and up-to-date website, as well as re-write materials provided to new students during orientation, etc. We also hope that, with the addition of another full time assistant dean in our office, a search we are trying to complete at the present time, we will all have more space to attend student events, create outreach opportunities, and engage with the Brown community in a way that helps student feel comfortable seeking our support.

In particular, while data from our recent survey shows that, demographically, student communities utilize our services at similar percentage rates to their composition within the larger Brown community, barriers may exist for some. Students of color, first generation and low income students, and members of the LGBTQ community, all utilize our services, but report feeling unsure that we provide a safe space. Data from our fall survey confirms that students who do utilize our office feel very well supported but some may avoid seeking us out due to perceived barriers and the very real barrier of our own homogeneity. We must be proactive in addressing these issues. We have already begun work to establish stronger partnerships with identity based centers on campus and will continue to work with these communities in the coming year to develop outreach plans that suit the needs of their respective students.

Necessary Resources:

The additional resources needed to accomplish our many goals have largely to do with time and information and it seems we are well positioned in terms of resources going into academic year 2017-2018.

An additional full time assistant dean and addition financial resources will allow us the time to better meet student need, create more outreach opportunities, and give staff greater opportunity for professional development, especially as it relates to issues of diversity and inclusion.

The completion of the self-study and external review, as well as other benchmarking efforts in which we are engaged, will inform the improvement of policies and processes. It is also our hope to establish an Ivy+ peer group in the coming year which can serve to enhance our understanding of best practices.

Given the crisis oriented nature of our work, we need to make a concerted effort to create time for things which are important, but not urgent, so that we can achieve our goals. Support from divisional leadership to prioritize these long-term goals will assist us in reaching them.

Conclusion:

The office of Student Support Services is in the center of a significant shift in culture and practice. While there will be growing pains, an optimistic and forward thinking mentality is being embraced. The foundational goal is to better serve and support Brown students. We will continue the work of clarifying roles and responsibilities and of revising policies and processes. Issues of diversity and inclusion must be central to each conversation. And our work, so intertwined with that of our campus partners, must be highly collaborative.

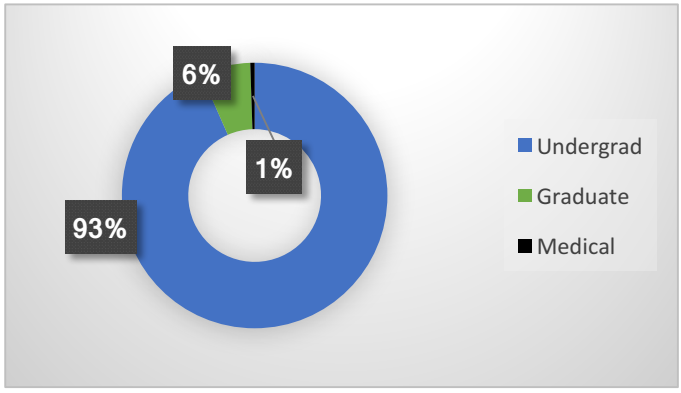
We have a very strong team, willing to work together to achieve our goals. We must balance the short and long term nature of these goals and set realistic expectations. However, it seems clear we are on a positive and forward moving path.

Appendix

Table 1: Student Contacts*

Unique Contacts	2072
Total Contacts	5802
Undergrad	1935
Graduate	126
Medical	11
Dean's Notes	910
FluWeb Contacts	244

Chart 1: Contacts by Student Level



*This data is drawn from Greensheets, our electronic record system, and is the best measure we have available. Staff enter notes in Greensheets for many, but not all, student contacts. As such, Greensheets is likely to be very accurate in terms of total number of unique student served, but less so with total contacts as multiple emails or follow up conversations may be included in a single Greensheets record. Still, the system gives a good sense of the volume of our work.

Chart 2: Contact Topics

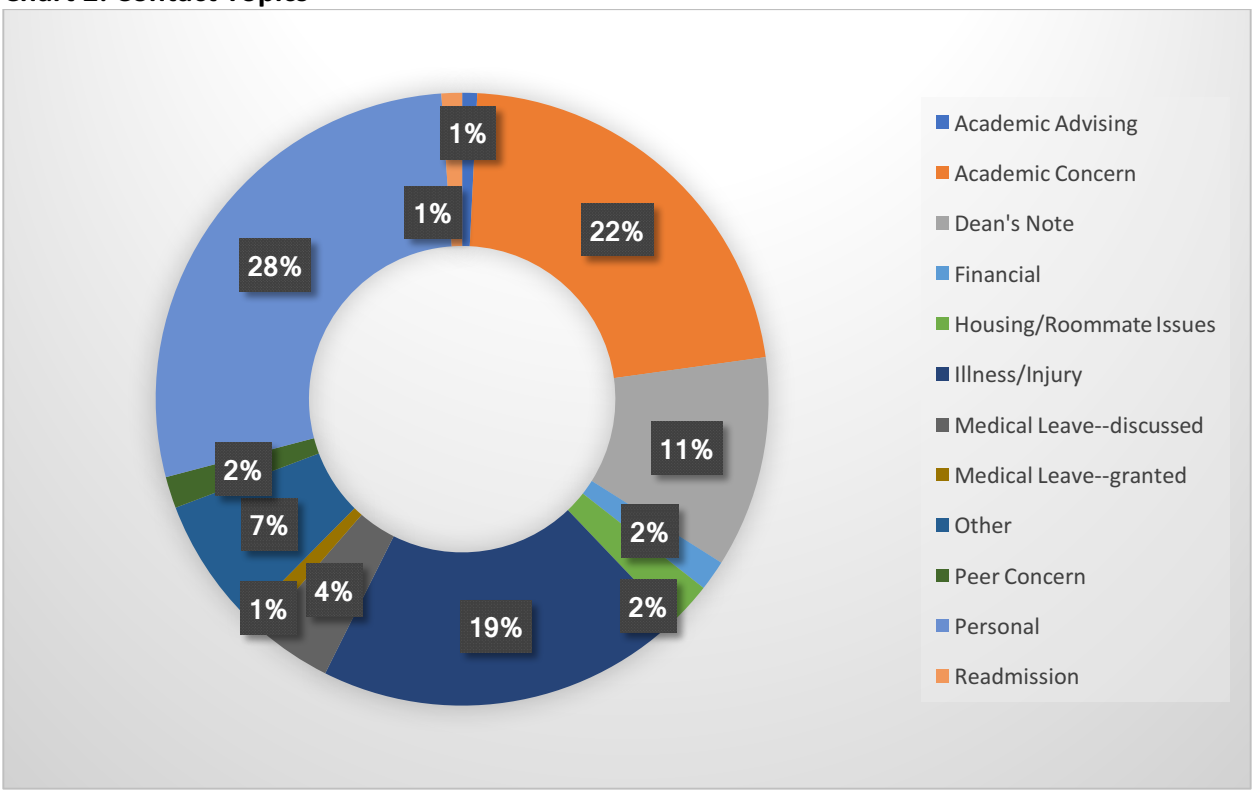


Table 2: Medical Leaves of Absence Granted

Fall 2016	44
Spring 2017	31
Total	**75**
Undergrad	62
Graduate	11
In Lieu of Academic Suspension	12

Table 3: Medical Leave Readmission Disposition

	Applied	Approved*	Denied	Appealed & Approved
Oct 2016 (for Spring 17 Return)	29	27	2	1
Feb 2017 (for Summer or Fall Return)	16	16	0	0
May 2017 (for Fall Return	21	21	0	0
Total	**66**	**64**	**2**	**1**

*In Oct 16, 2 graduate students were cleared by the ML Readmit committee but were not able to return to Brown due to lack of clearance from the Graduate School.

Table 4: Medical Leave Readmission Case Types

	Undergrad	Grad	CAS	UHS Clearance	CAPS Clearance	CAPS/UHS Clearance
Oct 2016 (for Spring 17 Return)	25	4	7	9	17	2
Feb 2017 (for Summer or Fall Return	13	3	3	2	13	1
May 2017 (for Fall Return	15	6	4	1	17	3
Total	53	13	14	12	47	6

Chart 3: Readmission Student Levels

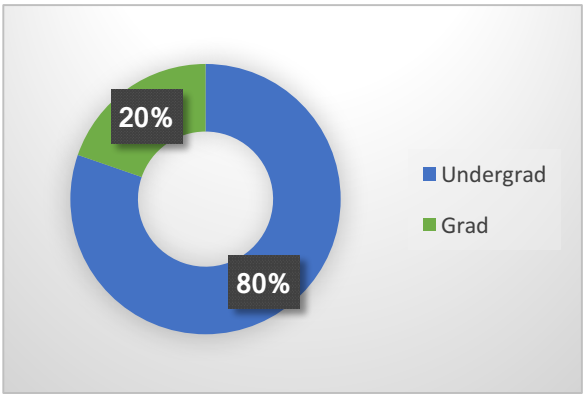


Chart 4: Readmission Clearance Types

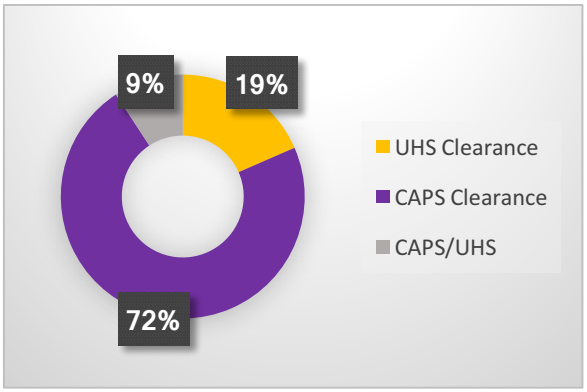


Chart 5: Concussion Support

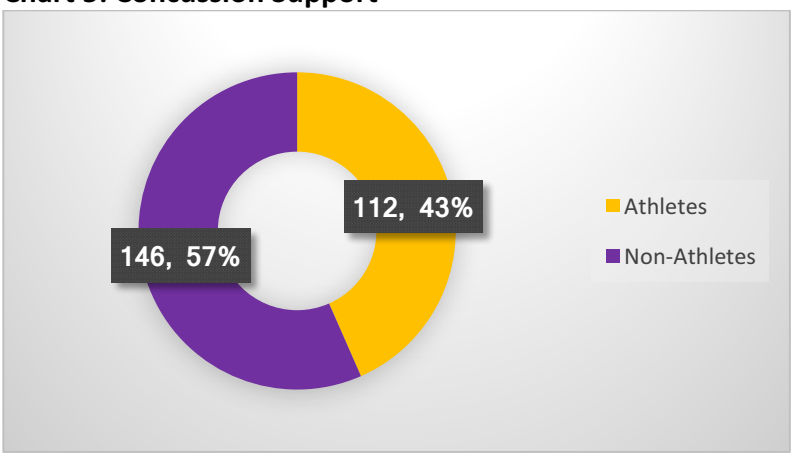


Table 5: Administrator on Call Contacts

	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Total
Tier 1 Calls	233	267	500
Tier 2 Calls	27	41	68
Tier 3 Calls	16	19	35

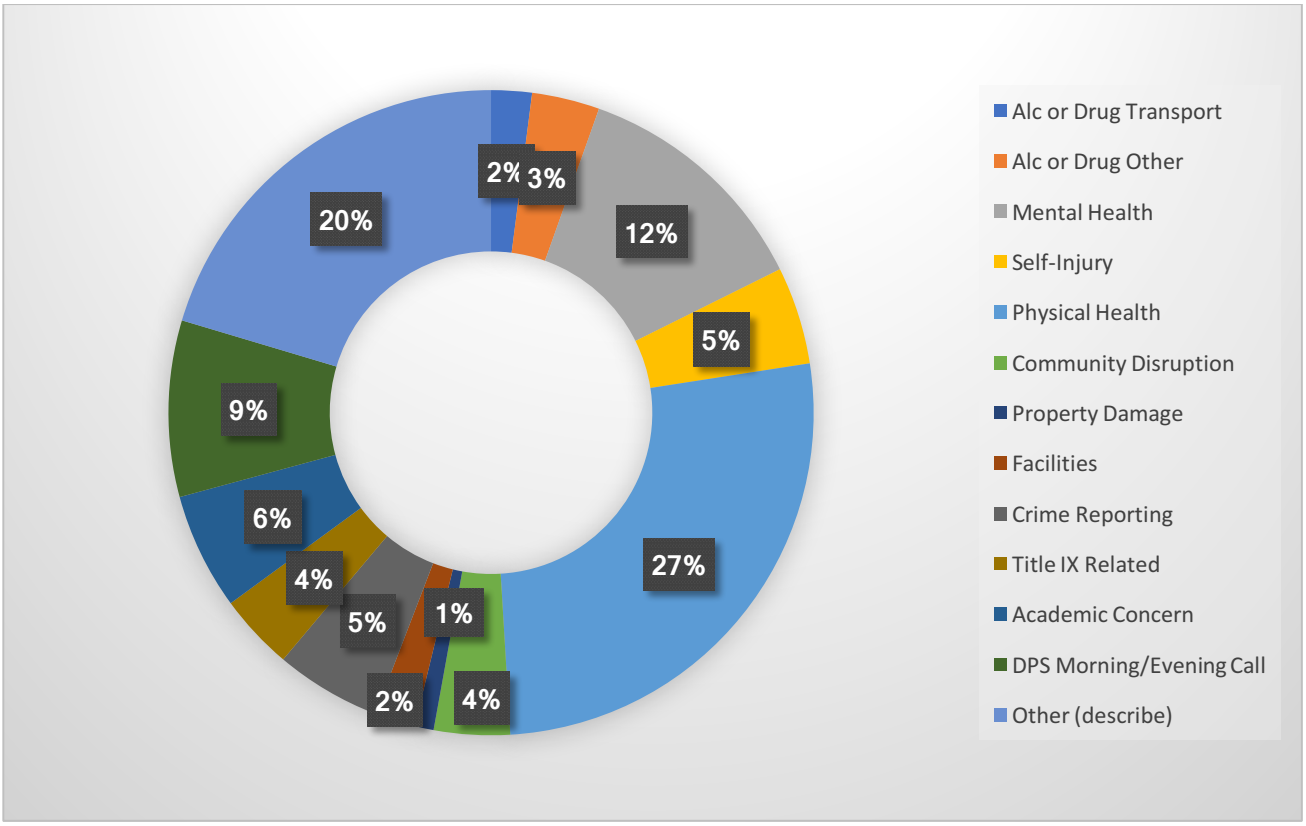



Chart 6: Administrator on Call Contact Topics