

# **Student Support Services Annual Report 2017-2018**

prepared by Timothy Shiner, Senior Associate Dean & Director

## **Introduction:**

The office of Student Support Services provides support for students experiencing any number of crises and/or challenging health or personal situations. Our goal is to provide a place where students can explore options in managing these life situations, help connect students to the right set of resources for them, and help them to determine a path forward.

2017-2018 was another year of significant transition with expansion and enhancement of our staffing structure and efforts to be involved in division and university wide changes. Substantial progress was achieved in previous year goals to improve the medical leave process, strengthen campus partner relationships and to define office protocols and practices. However, there is still work to be done in these areas, as well as a new set of challenges as we continue to enhance our services.

## **Significant Accomplishments:**

- In summer 2017, we completed an external review. The report from the external reviewers aided in setting a direction for our work and many of its recommendations have been completed, as summarized below.
- In summer 2017, we welcomed an additional dean to our team. The additional staff resources have allowed us to begin to expand our outreach efforts and to continue to look at our office processes and procedures in new ways.
- In March 2018, significant changes to our staffing structure occurred in recognition of the experience of and level of risk managed by staff in the office, as well as the divisional priority in developmental mentoring and advising. Assistant deans were promoted to associate dean level and our most seasoned dean was promoted to assistant director in addition to her dean role. The director position was raised to a senior associate dean to recognize oversight of four associate dean level positions.
- SSS Staff supported 1692 unique students this year.<sup>1</sup> Greensheets, our record system, shows 7996 individual contacts (up from 5802 contacts last year) 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. The most common topics about which students saw us continue to be academic concerns, illness/injury, and personal concerns (which are often mental health related). More detailed information on our contacts can be found in Appendix I: Table 1 & Charts 1.
- Significant progress was made in the implementation of action items from our Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). Additional details are included in Appendix II. Highlights include:
  - We continued to hold monthly professional development lunches 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.
  - We conducted two focus groups with communities that have been underserved by our office based on previous data to learn more about how we can improve our services for them (male identified students and international students).
  - We continued to work on building strong liaison partnerships with the identity based centers on campus.
  - We began a more concerted discussion with our colleagues in the office of the Dean of the College on how we can support students from historically underrepresented groups better between our two offices.

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<sup>1</sup> \*Last year, unique contacts was calculated by dean and then all dean's unique contacts added for a grand total. However, this created a misrepresentation in that students who worked with more than one dean over the course of the year were counted multiple times. This year, this is corrected, hence the lower number of unique contacts comparatively.

- Clarification of our identity and the first stage of revamping our community outreach took place. In addition to finalizing a mission statement, and refining a common way of describing our work to students and campus constituents, we implemented a brand new website, developed new materials for orientation and outreach events, and we conducted a survey to explore changing the name of the office, which ultimately led to us deciding not to do so at this time.
- We implemented a recommendation to have a formal documentation protocol for the office. This protocol has helped to increase consistency in the number and level of detail of notes placed in Greensheets. In addition, the office cleaned out our paper records for the first time in over a decade, setting up a clear archive of inactive students that will streamline the process of disposing of records at the appropriate intervals and making accessing active student files much more efficient.
- We completed a thorough revision of our medical leave clearance guidelines and the implementation of the new guidelines. Our aim was to be more transparent and compassionate for students. Overall student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive to the new guidelines.
- The medical leave process was further improved by creating clearer distinctions between graduate and undergraduate student process. The graduate student leave process is now fully housed in the Graduate School creating a more streamlined experience for those students. However, the SSS Coordinator continues to support the Associate Dean of the Graduate School for Student Support in processing graduate student medical leaves and has worked hard to create systems and processes for an efficient process.
- The office has continued to dedicate time and effort to shifting the overall narrative regarding medical leaves. We sought to communicate the changes we've made and to be transparent about our philosophical approach to leaves. Staff attended trainings and workshops with student leaders and met with key student partners such as Project LETS and the CRC leavetaking coordinators to help shift the narrative regarding student experience around medical leave. The Medical Leaves of Absence Demystified blog has also been continued with new narratives added to the site. Our effort is most dedicated to the actual students taking and returning from leaves and assuring they feel supported. Detailed data on the number of leaves and clearances to return can be found in Appendix I: Tables 2-4; Chart 2.
- While a work in progress, ongoing conversations on the purpose and function of the Care Team have been an important priority. This year, conversations resulted in making a description of the Care Team and its role public, changing the name from Students of Concern meeting to Care Team, and engaging in conversation on the purpose of the group and the ways in which we hold ourselves to a high standard around student privacy.

- We continue to support a large number of students through the FluWeb system, which is primarily coordinated by our Administrative Coordinator. This year, 267 students were supported through FluWeb.
- SSS continues to oversee policies and protocols related to supporting concussed students. Working with stakeholders in campus partner offices in an ongoing way, staff continued to improve our processes to provide seamless care and support to these students. Information on the number of concussion cases supported can be found in Appendix I: Chart 3.
- SSS also oversees the Administrator on Call (AOC) system. This year, we continued to improve protocols by adding and adjusting as situations arose. Protocols were updated for death of a student and concerns regarding students abroad. We also continued to provide a bi-weekly ongoing training for AOC team members. The AOC team fielded nearly 550 calls this year with the most common calls involving physical health and mental health concerns. More detailed information on our contacts can be found in Appendix I: Table 5; Chart 4.
- SSS did significant work this past year around other protocols and processes including defining a parental notification protocol, clarifying post-hospitalization processes within our office and in relationship to CAPS, and numerous other minor adjustments.

### **Critical Priorities:**

#### **Changing Role of Student Support Deans**

As the university, division, and our department continue in a period of significant growth and change, and in recognition of the changing needs of our students, much work has been done in the past two years to rethink our work and improve our services. As we continue this work, more is revealed to us about the work that still needs to be done. Clarifying the nature and boundaries of the role of a dean in Student Support Services and some of our specific processes will be a priority in the coming months. Some specific short term action items include:

1. Updating a variety of minor logistic processes and practices involving how appointments are scheduled, our in-take form, etc.
2. Clarifying best practices around serving as Dean of the Day, referrals between deans, managing of resources for students in financial crises, etc.
3. Continued work with CIS to advocate for the prioritization of a new software system. The parameters of the project have been thoroughly defined but other university priorities have slowed progress with implementation.
4. Continuing to enhance outreach activities from Student Support (see below).

This work involves synthesizing the ample and diverse experience of our team as well as seeking information from campus and peer institutions. This summer, we will host an Ivy+ meeting of our colleagues which will be an excellent opportunity to further this goal. As we continue this

work, bring in new perspectives, and seek student input to guide our best practices, we aim to move through a period of transition and the accompanying growing pains toward a seamless and strong resource for students.

### **Outreach Initiatives**

While significant efforts were made in outreach initiatives this year, we are working to create more space to expand this work. This year, we implemented a new website, staff attended many events sponsored by numerous communities increasing face time and student awareness of our team, and our liaison roles with identity centers on campus began to yield some results including recognition of staff, events held at some of the centers, and inclusion in initiative sponsored by those colleagues and students. In addition, two focus groups held as part of our DIAP initiatives gave us valuable insight as to how we can better serve the respective constituencies.

In the coming year, we aim to expand and enhance this progress in a variety of ways including:

1. Implementing some of the feedback from the focus groups with male identified students and international students respectively. For example, we have plans to work with the Sheridan Center and DOC to include recommended language on seeking support in faculty syllabi, to work with Residential Life to develop a resource poster for RPLs to hang in their halls introducing students to our role in a way that reflects the feedback students indicated would be most useful, and to work on informal meet and greet opportunities to interact with international students to help foster relationships.
2. We have worked with Graphic Services on the development of a brochure which will highlight our work and the many enhancements we have made in the past two years which will be published in summer 2018.
3. We will strengthen our existing liaison relationships by working with the respective centers on how we can best serve their communities, including considering the idea of open hours in those spaces and in meeting with colleagues in those spaces to discuss students who may need additional support.
4. We intend to expand our liaison partnerships to key academic departments where students report encountering particularly difficult challenges (e.g. Engineering, CS)
5. We will work to increase capacity for all staff to be out of the office and engaged in campus initiatives that will enhance relationships with students and with colleagues.

### **Assessment**

A third major priority for the coming year is to enhance the assessment being done through our office. While we have made progress in the past two years with a major student survey, focus groups, our self-study and external review, we still have no ongoing or annual formal assessment.

One major idea is the development of a short survey which would be regularly distributed to students. This would allow us to not only obtain a more regular sense of student satisfaction with the support they receive from our office broadly, but also has the potential to offer structured feedback to individual staff in a way that has been limited in the past. This may take

the form of a link in our email signatures which encourages students to complete a short feedback survey, a survey sent to students after they have an appointment, or perhaps something sent once a semester to students who have utilized our services. The correct balance needs to be struck between brevity and quality data.

We also intend to continue our focus groups, enhancing their structure and looking to our DIAP to guide additional communities with whom we want to deeply engage.

### **Necessary Resources:**

The resources needed for the achievement of our goals in academic year 2018-2019 are mostly related to time, energy, and information.

With the formation of our Ivy+ group as a benchmarking resource and working as a team to clarify protocols and practices much of our first priority should be accomplished. We need the support and vision of divisional leadership to serve as a sounding board as we move toward a common understanding of our office's evolving nature.

We will continue working to shift the narrative around our office in general and around medical leaves. Significant progress has been made but more work needs to be done, particularly in relationship to some historically underrepresented groups. We will also continue to work on any outstanding recommendations from our external review and our DIAP, including the development of the next iteration of our DIAP initiatives (See Appendix 2).

As noted last year, a central challenge of our work is to make time for initiatives which are important but not urgent. Particularly during the academic year, our work is so driven by student crisis, it can be difficult to prioritize strategic initiatives. Support from divisional leadership to prioritize these long-term goals will assist us in reaching them.

### **Conclusion:**

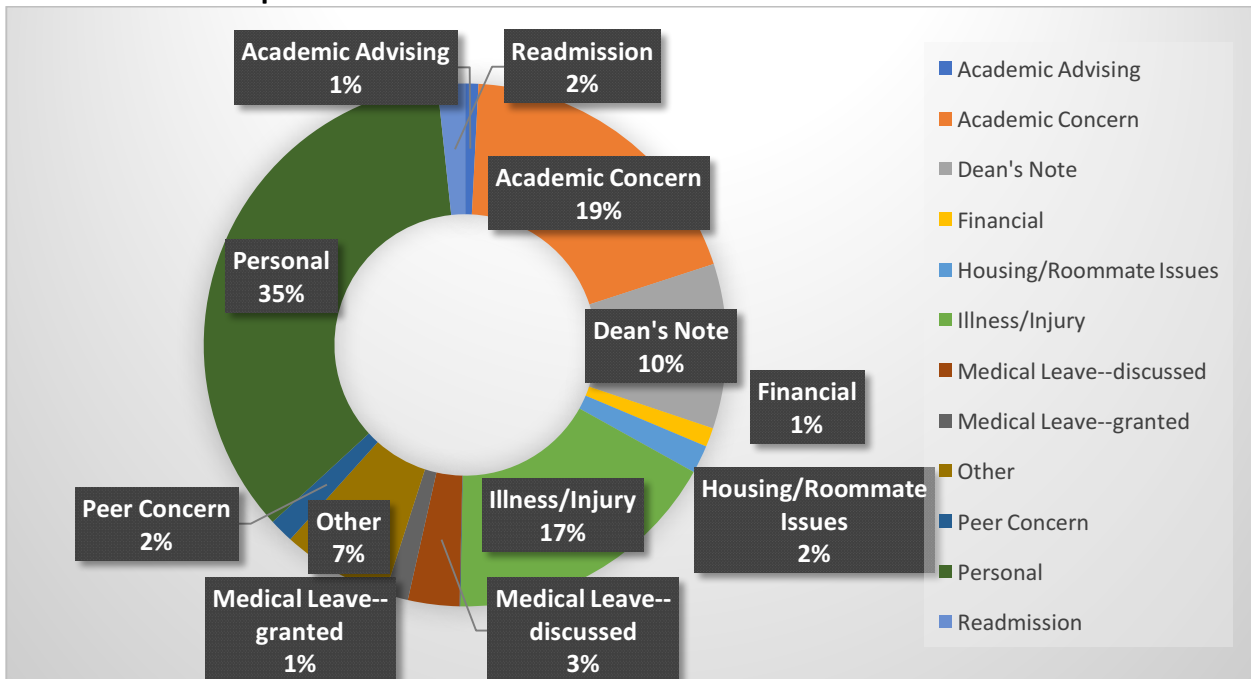
The office of Student Support Services continues to be in a significant shift in culture and practice. While there have been growing pains, by clarifying the nature of our office and our roles in supporting students, our goal is to be an outstanding resource to our community. The path forward seems clear, to clarify our role, help the community better understand and be aware of our office through outreach, and to assess our achievement of our goals in more structured ways.

# Appendix 1: Statistics

**Table 1: Student Contacts**

Unique Contacts	1692
Total Contacts	7996
Undergrad	1620
Graduate	67
Medical	5
Dean's Notes	970
FluWeb Contacts	267

**Chart 1: Contact Topics**



**Table 2: Medical Leaves of Absence Granted**

Fall 2017	41
Spring 2018	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>
In Lieu of Academic Suspension	28

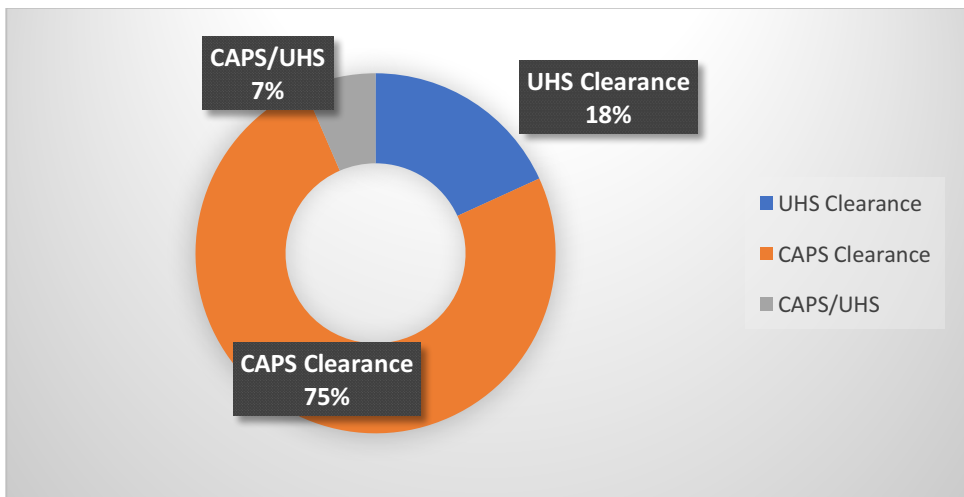
**Table 3: Medical Leave Readmission Disposition**

	Applied	Approved*	Denied	Appealed
Oct 2017 (for Spring 18 Return)	19	17	2	0
Feb 2018 (for Summer or Fall Return)	14	13	1	0
May 2018 (for Fall Return)	42	41	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 4: Medical Leave Readmission Case Types**

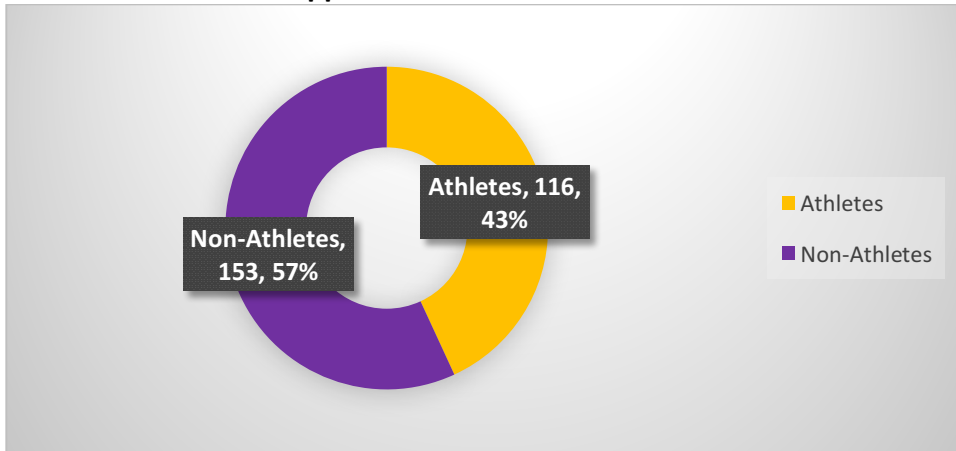
	CAS	UHS Clearance	CAPS Clearance	CAPS/UHS Clearance
Oct 2017 (for Spring 18 Return)	3	3	14	2
Feb 2018 (for Summer or Fall Return)	8	2	12	1
May 2018 (for Fall Return)	12	9	32	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>5</b>

**Chart 2: Readmission Clearance Types**





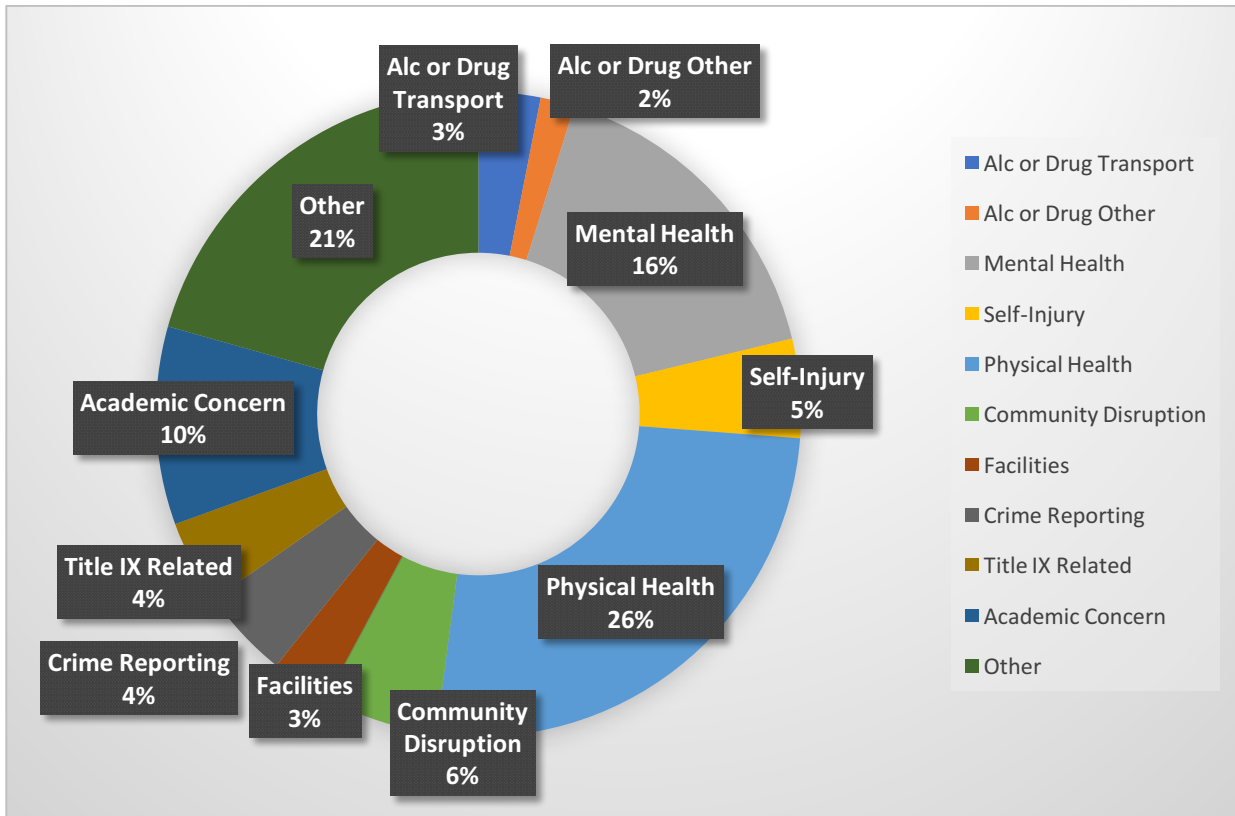
**Chart 3: Concussion Support**



**Table 5: Administrator on Call Contacts**

	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Total
Tier 1 Calls	232	203	435
Tier 2 Calls	39	38	77
Tier 3 Calls	17	18	35

**Chart 4: Administrator on Call Contact Topics**



## **Appendix II: DIAP Updates**

Below are updates to our Departmental Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). We have summarized each action item found in section IV of our DIAP and commented on our progress toward it this year. To view the original action items as written, our full DIAP is available on our website. Our team is now working on the next iteration of our DIAP with new action items to build on those completed.

### **Specific DIAP Goals and Objectives**

#### **A. People**

1. Our first goal was to develop strong diverse pools of candidates whenever we run a search. In our one search since our DIAP, we successfully developed a diverse pool and hired a new staff person who brought new identities and experiences to our team. We remain committed to this goal for future searches.
2. All job descriptions have been revised to make commitment to issues of diversity and inclusion and experience with working with specific marginalized communities key aspects of the core job description.
3. A commitment to professional development in these areas was made in our DIAP for each staff and the details of our work in this area are detailed in section B below.

#### **B. Professional Development**

1. We made a commitment for staff to participate in available on campus professional development opportunities. This year, staff attended many events, lectures and workshops. Three staff participated in a yearlong Critical Consciousness Reading Group (CCRG) and staff attended the Campus Life Social Justice retreat.
2. We committed to self-assessment and staff were provided an updated version of the Social Distance Matrix (Bogardus) and encouraged to participate in Harvard's Implicit Bias study. Additional follow up is needed on next steps from what staff learned from this self-reflection.
3. We have continued to have monthly staff lunches during the academic year where we discuss specific communities and experiences. Staff are given a video or reading to review in advance and then we discuss. This year, topics included students on the spectrum, white fragility, the experience of Muslim students, the experience of mental health in Asian communities, and the experience of LGBTQ Latinx students.
4. We committed to staff attending at least one campus event around these topics each semester. Between the CCRG, Campus Life retreat, Minority Peer Counselor (MPC) workshops, other lectures and events, staff have done more than this minimum requirement.
5. We committed to create a shared folder of articles and resources and that each person would contribute writing and commit to reading at least one item a month. This task is more self-driven and so folks have not necessarily read one every month. However, staff have been contributing articles and resources with regularity.
6. We committed to creating opportunities for staff to assist in coordinating and facilitating conversations around diversity and inclusion that benefit both our department and students

and colleagues across campus. All staff have participated in at least two panels, workshops and/or programs across campus this past year.

7. We committed to each staff person participating in a committee, policy and procedure development, or other collaborative work with colleagues around campus around these topics. Staff were involved in groups addressing DIAP issues broadly as well as support for undocumented students, international students, students with disabilities, and students in recovery.

8. Each staff person was asked to include a DIAP related goal in their personal goals for the year. All staff did so and completed those goals. They included items such as participation in the yearlong CCRG, attendance at a national conference around these topics, and working on specific collaborations with identity centers on campus.

9. We committed to providing funding for staff to attend off campus professional development in collaboration with the VPs office. Through the Campus Life Professional Development fund, we were able to send one staff person to a national conference and we have plans to host an Ivy+ meeting later this summer where diversity and inclusion will be a key topic.

### C. Program

#### 1. Accessibility of Office to Specific Communities

- a) We distributed a survey tool to our colleagues and had 33 colleagues respond. The vast majority expressed high confidence in our office's ability to work with a broad array of students. Two colleagues expressed moderate reservations about our work with students of color, low-income students, first-generation college students and undocumented students. This feedback will inform our work moving forward.
- b) We conducted two focus groups this year. One with male identified students and one with international students. These were communities that our previous survey showed perceived barriers to working with our office. We are using the feedback received from these focus groups to inform our outreach initiatives and guide our work in reducing barriers moving forward. Specific action items will be included in the next iteration of our DIAP and we also plan to have additional focus groups this coming year.
- c) We have continued to work closely with colleagues on a case-by-case basis on financial emergencies for students. Each situation is unique, but we are hoping to move forward this summer with development of more clear criteria and protocols to support students in these situations. However, we have been able to support several students this year both in direct emergency funds (for travel, family accommodations when coming to Providence in emergency) as well as both connecting to other resources and advocating on behalf of a student.
- d) We have worked to develop liaison relationships with the various identity centers on campus to varying success. We have tried to let the respective communities guide how we can be most useful. We've had a very successful collaborative event with the FLi Center in the fall and staff have participated in events at all the centers, as well as connected with center staff. The next iteration of our DIAP will include a continuation and slight variation on this work and we plan to pursue holding open hours in the centers if they are receptive to the idea.

- e) We have continued to work with the Graduate School and Medical School. In particular, our processes with the Graduate School have become more clearly defined, though there is work still to be done.
- f) As noted, one of our focus groups focused on male identified students and specific outreach initiatives are being developed using that feedback.

## 2. Processes & Structure

- a. Our mission statement was re-written to centralize issues of diversity and inclusion.
- b. We conducted an external review where reviewers with diversity and inclusion expertise were chosen and asked to look at our work in these areas. Their report included feedback which validated our current understanding of our strengths and areas for growth.
- c. We have a new website which directly addresses and integrates questions of diversity and inclusion. We intend to add more content this summer with the goal of making our office seem more approachable and accessible to all students.

## C. Policies

- a. We have reviewed all of our internal processes and protocols and made numerous changes. However, as we grow in these areas, we continue to reevaluate some processes, particular in collaboration with campus partners, and this work will be more ongoing than initially anticipated.
- b. However, we have made significant progress around medical leaves. Numerous students have told us anecdotally, and we have some additional data from the Curricular Resource Center, that students from all backgrounds are having much more positive experiences with both leavetaking and returning from leave. We do have plans to further develop some of the resources related to transition back to Brown which will address some remaining concerns and facilitate students who may face additional barriers in having a seamless transition.