Name of Department/Unit: Student Support Services

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Process: The staff of Student Support Services met in August 2016 for a retreat to discuss many aspects of the office's mission and work. Integral to this conversation were issues of diversity and inclusion. Staff then reviewed existing student feedback from individuals and from the Mental Health Community Council. Based on the retreat conversation and existing data, and using guidance from the Campus Life Executive Group, an initial outline of the plan was drafted.

Throughout Fall 2016, staff were also working closely with the student leavetaking coordinators from the Curricular Resource Center on aspects of the medical leave process. Their feedback, including data from two student run surveys, was reviewed. This initial draft plan was shared with the staff in mid Fall 2016 and discussed at subsequent meetings focused on this topic. Simultaneously, the office conducted a survey of all students who had interacted with our office in the past two years. The survey collected demographic data and specifically asked questions related to this plan. This feedback was integrated into the next draft of the plan. The information learned from this survey also informed the direction, indicated in section 4 of the plan, for ongoing student engagement with the evolving plan.

I. **Departmental Vision/Mission Statement on Diversity & Inclusion**

The Student Support Services staff is available to assist students with a wide-range of issues and concerns that might arise during their time at Brown. The Student Support Services Deans provide 24-hour crisis services for undergraduate, graduate, and medical students with personal or family emergencies, and are available by appointment to consult with individual students about their personal questions/concerns, thus allowing students to succeed and thrive in their academic pursuits.

Issues of diversity and inclusion are core to our mission in several ways.
- We seek to understand the full context of a student's identity in relation to the support they seek from us. We believe this is critical to understanding any issue with which they may come to us for support. A student's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, religious or spiritual identity, sex, ability or disability, country of origin, documentation status, first generation college student status, and other aspects of identity may all impact how they experience academic struggles, conflicts with others in the community, consideration of workload reduction or medical leave, or any other issue with which we might be supporting them.
- While much of our work is with individual students, we do have the opportunity to engage in education and outreach to students, staff, & faculty on topics related to helping students in distress. In doing so, we seek to educate others in the community on the

ways in which systems of privilege and oppression may impact a student's experience of various challenges and crises.
● Our team is part of many conversations on issues of policy and procedure. We seek to center issues of diversity and inclusion in these conversations so that policies and procedures are equitable and foster a community where students of all backgrounds may thrive and receive the support they need to do so.

II. **Identified strengths and existing resources related to diversity and inclusion:**
   A. People
      1. SSS has six full time staff. Our staff is predominately white, with some gender diversity, and some representation from the LGBTQ community. Students report feeling very validated when they are able to connect with a staff person who shares an important identity with them. Students also explicitly noted how inclusive the office was despite interacting with someone who did not share an identity.[3] For instance, one student noted, "Although those that I spoke to did not share my identities, I felt comfortable and safe talking to them about my issues." Another student noted, "I don't think I was judged at all based on my race or background, which made me feel like I could open up to the deans more freely and [I was] listened to objectively. The Deans were really nice about listening and understanding."
      2. Staff, regardless of their personal identities, engage in conversations around issues of diversity and inclusion, as part of regular staff meetings, with colleagues across our division and with students. Individual staff have specific subject matters expertise on various communities, including international students, undocumented students, transgender students and others with a non-binary gender identity, students of color, low income students, students with mental health issues, and religious and spiritual identities. Staff consult and work with one another to learn from one another's experience in these areas.

   B. Professional development
      1. Staff participate in opportunities provided on campus. In the past year, staff participated in the Unpacking Diversity & Inclusion day, the Campus Life Diversity & Inclusion retreat (including serving on the planning committee), and staff have attended various other campus events related to diversity and inclusion. Staff have also provided their experience and support at protests and demonstrations on campus, serving as a resource to encourage effective dialogue across difference.
      2. Staff serve as Campus Life representatives on a variety of committees which address issues of diversity and inclusion.

   C. Program
      1. Accessibility of Office to Specific Communities

a) Our office serves many students on campus from many different backgrounds. There is a perception that some communities may be more likely to seek out our services for cultural reasons. For instance, some students coming from parts of the world where there is more significant stigma attached to mental health issues may be more likely to come to us initially rather than Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS). In addition, we see many transgender students and others who identify with a non-binary gender identity.

b) There is a perception that all communities at Brown feel they can seek assistance from Student Support Services. This is supported by data from our Fall 2016 which showed that most communities at Brown access our services in proportion to university demographics. Further, satisfaction was mostly positive and consistent across communities.[3] The few exceptions to this are noted in the areas for improvement section below.

c) At a full ⅓ of respondents, LGB students were overrepresented in response to our survey compared to the most recent Senior Survey data which indicates they comprise about 20% of the Brown student body. Similarly about 5% of respondents identified as trans or gender non-binary compared with 1.1% of respondents to the Senior Survey. While it is difficult to know whether they are using our services disproportionately to their peers or just responded to the survey more, it is an important population to assure we are serving well.

d) First generation college students were overrepresented in our survey results by almost double, showing they are a high user of our resources with high satisfaction on the assistance received.[3] 28% of our survey respondents identified as first gen with 93% of those students indicating that SSS staff understood their concerns in relation to their specific circumstances and 93% also indicating that SSS was helpful to them.

2. Processes & Structure

a) Our office is the central point of contact for transgender students who wish to change their name in the official university record system.

b) We are structurally positioned with the university in the same reporting unit with many of the centers which support students from marginalized backgrounds (Brown Center for Students of Color, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, LGBTQ Center, Office of International Student & Visitor Experience, First Generation and Low Income Center). This should lend itself to strong working relationships with these centers.

c) Students report positive, non-judgemental experiences around mental health related concerns and crisis support, despite the larger societal stigma which persists around these issues.[1 & 2] Survey data supports this is the case across demographic differences.[3] Students report feeling "heard" by our team.

III. **Identified areas of improvement/expansion of diversity and inclusion efforts:**

A. People
   1. With six full time staff, compositional diversity is a challenge. This is particularly true around race and ethnicity. Students consistently note that representation is very important to them and that, in particular, more staff of color would help them to feel supported by the office.[3] Several students told stories that indicated interacting with someone who shared some aspect of their identity made them feel more comfortable. For instance, one student noted, "More ethnic/racial diversity would be much appreciated! Especially if I wanted to speak with someone about some kind of racially-linked situation, I would prefer to speak with a woman of color."
   2. Job descriptions are likely to note that competence working with diverse communities is required and having some level of diverse lived experience is encouraged.

B. Professional Development
   1. Staff across levels may have varying degrees of knowledge on different aspects of diversity (race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, ability/disability, religious difference, international students, first generation students).
   2. There are time barriers to participation in campus opportunities. While staff often work beyond a normal work day, we are still pressed to serve the need coming into our office.

C. Program
   1. Accessibility of Office to Specific Communities
      a) Students who identified as transgender or gender non-binary were slightly more neutral in their satisfaction with the support they received from SSS than cisgender students showing a need to improve staff knowledge in this area.[3] While the sample was small, of the five students who responded to our survey, two indicated it was a helpful experience, two indicated neutral experiences, and one indicated a somewhat unhelpful experience. Comparatively, 87% of students who identified as either male or female indicated a positive, helpful experience.
      b) Students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual also report slightly more neutral experience than students identifying as heterosexual when asked about SSS understanding their concern specific to their situation. Satisfaction with their interactions varied with 78% reported they were happy with the help they received and 85% indicating they felt SSS staff understand their concerns. Heterosexual identified students indicated 88% and 90% satisfaction on those same measures. However, several students also noted how validated they felt around issues of sexual orientation.[3] For instance, one student noted, "I felt very supported as an LGBTQ student." Another told a

story of how the way a specific staff person set up the office environment made them feel supported as an LGBT person. The dissonance needs to be understood and addressed.

c) Students with high-financial need often do not have the financial or cultural capital to be able to see the benefits/drawbacks of taking a personal vs a medical leave and vice versa. For these students, it may be easier to request an additional 9th semester of aid if a documented medical leave of absence is taken instead of a personal leave. That is, a full-paying student may decide to take a personal leave instead of a medical leave and in this way not only be able to come back the next semester (instead of a full year as suggested by a MLOA) but avoid going through the readmission process.[3] Students also consistently reported that a lack of financial resources in a crisis limited the ways in which SSS could be useful.[3] For example, one student noted that the top improvement we could make would be "More access to funds for emergencies i.e. the emergency fund and other related funds." While the centralization of these funds means this falls outside of our office, it illustrates how important it is for us to have a strong knowledge of these concerns and a strong relationship with the staff responsible for these funds (e.g. the Assistant Dean of the College for Financial Advising).

d) Our work may be perceived as undergraduate focused. While additional layers of related support exist in the graduate and medical schools, our office does serve these populations. We should improve our policies and processes so that we work seamlessly with our colleagues in those areas in a system with clearly defined roles and responsibilities that best support those communities.

e) One striking demographic dissonance revealed in our study was that only 21% of survey respondents were male identified.[3] This is the most glaring discrepancy in terms of representation of students using SSS compared to our larger community of any demographic marker.

2. Processes & Structure

a) Certain processes which our office oversees have a reputation on campus for being difficult or not in line with student experience. In particular, the Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA) process has a narrative around it in the student body that students may be forced to go on leave, that the process is not sufficiently empathetic to the student experience, etc. [1 & 2] At least one of these narratives discusses the university's lack of support for "minority students" returning from leave.[2] This is particularly important as data provided by the Office of Institutional Research shows that students from Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGs) have taken MLOA at a rate of 1-2% more than the overall student population in each of the past five years. While less consistent, aided students and first generation students also show higher percentages of medical leavetaking in some of the last five years.[6]

b) In addition, some processes which our office oversees may have particular complications for communities of color, LGBTQ students, international students, and/or first generation and low-income students. Students who need to take a medical leave may have circumstances which complicate the leave. For instance, an LGBTQ student for whom it is not safe to go to their family home; an international student whose visa status will be impacted by a leave, or a low-income student who does not have the financial resources to pack up and move on short notice. Other processes in our office (post-hospitalization, workload reduction, etc.) may have similar complications.

c) Student Support Services work is almost entirely reactive to student crisis leaving little time for outreach, professional development, etc. In addition, the reactive nature and volume of our work can make the work transactional at peak time, making it challenging to consider the ways in which an individual's identities and narrative impact their situation. [1 & 2]

d) It was noted above that we are structurally in the same unit with many campus centers working around issues of diversity and inclusion. One area we often work closely with, but which was recently relocated to an adjacent unit is our Student & Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS) office. We need to attend to this relationship and make sure it remains strong.

IV. **Specific DIAP Goals and Objectives**

A. People
   1. As staff openings occur, including the upcoming addition of a seventh full time position in the office, we must develop a strong diverse pool of candidates which create opportunities to improve representation of historically underrepresented groups. This is something students specifically have asked for from our office.[3] (Ongoing but beginning Spring 2017)
   2. Likewise, job descriptions should be revised to always include ability to work with diverse communities as a requirement and consideration should be given in job description writing to including expertise with specific communities, such as students of color, as a job requirement. Responsibilities within job descriptions may include outreach to specific communities, service on certain committees, etc. which both integrate and codify diversity and inclusion work as part of our jobs, but also signal to potential candidates that these are core to our values. (by September 2017)
   3. Commitment to and knowledge of working with various communities must be continually attended to for all staff. Specific actions are outlined in the professional development section below. (Ongoing)
   4. Drawing on the work of Jamie Washington,[4] staff should be committed to the concept of "distinguishing behavior". This concept notes that we are responsible for showing that we are welcoming through our concrete behavior, rather than

relying on historically underrepresented groups and/or marginalized communities to give us the benefit of the doubt. This requires us to be proactive in outreach and self-education. Self-education is outlined in the professional development section below. Outreach is outlined in the program section.

B. Professional Development
   1. Make it an expectation that staff take advantage of professional development opportunities existing on campus. All staff should be encouraged to do so appropriate to their role. Time must be created for people to do so within their responsibilities.(Ongoing)
   2. Assess staff knowledge around different aspects of diversity (race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, ability/disability, religious difference). Plan opportunities for learning accordingly. (Fall 2017 with more specific plans to be developed)
   3. Prioritize student identified topics (race, gender inclusive language, experiences of international students) as professional development areas.[3] (Academic Year 2016-2017, Ongoing)
   4. Plan monthly staff meetings to engage in dialogue about topics of diversity and inclusion (discuss current event, read an article, invited guest, etc). This has happened each month in academic year 2016-2017 with meetings on understanding white privilege, and individual meetings respectively on the experiences of trans/non-binary students, students with disabilities, undocumented/DACA students, and barriers to help seeking behaviors in male identified students. (Begin academic year 2016-2017, Ongoing)
   5. Create space for each staff person to participate in at least one campus opportunity each semester. (Ongoing)
   6. Create a shared folder where articles of interest can be placed for staff to review. Set an expectation that each staff person find at least one article to contribute each semester and that each staff person read at least one article each month. (Begin Fall 2016, Ongoing)
   7. Create 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. This might occur through the Campus Life Roundtables program, or annual events like the Campus Life Social Justice Retreat, Staff Development Day, Unpacking Diversity & Inclusion day, etc. (Ongoing)
   8. Create opportunities for staff to use and/or expand expertise by participating in committees, policy and procedure development, or other collaborative work with other colleagues around campus, thus allowing us to grow and also to be actively engaged community members on campus around issues of diversity and inclusion. Each staff person should participate in at least one such opportunity each year. (Ongoing)

9. Have each staff person include diversity and inclusion items in their personal annual goals beginning in academic year 2017-2018. This assures that work around issues of diversity and inclusion, in addition to the core competency, is part of annual performance appraisals. (August 2017)

10. Provide funding for staff member to attend professional development opportunities related to issues of diversity and inclusion beyond campus . We will need to work closely with the Vice President's office to find meaningful opportunities and develop resources to allow this, and thus it is a longer term goal. (Ongoing)

C. Program
1. Accessibility of Office to Specific Communities
   a) Building on student survey already completed, develop and distribute a tool to colleagues and collaborators to obtain feedback on their perceptions of our office as it relates to issues of diversity and inclusion. (Fall 2017)
   b) Building on the student survey already completed, conduct focus groups with different communities identified as either less satisfied with SSS (e.g. LGBTQ) or with perceptions of barriers of use (e.g. Students of Color) to further explore the nuances of our strengths and areas for growth around issues of diversity and inclusion. (Fall 2017)
   c) Continue to be involved in campus conversations about financial resources in moments of crisis to advocate for student need.[3] Collaborate closely with Dean Vernicia Elie, the First Generation and Low Income Center and other stakeholders. (Ongoing)
   d) Examine the idea of assigning liaison staff to underserved communities on campus. Staff would commit to holding outreach with each assigned community at least once each semester to build stronger relationships. This reflects student requests for outreach and relationship building with specific communities.[3] Potential collaborators (e.g. identity based centers) must be consulted in the planning to assure we are serving the community needs rather than imposing ourselves. (Pilot Spring 2017, Adjust and expand Fall 2017)
   e) Work closely with colleagues in the Graduate School and Medical School to improve our processes with these offices. We should improve our policies and processes so that we work seamlessly with our colleagues in those areas in a system with clearly defined roles and responsibilities that best support those communities.
      (1) An initial draft of workflow policies and processes was developed with the Graduate School deans in Fall 2016, revisited in January 2017 and will be revisited again at the end of the Spring 2017 semester.
      (2) Initial relationship building meetings with staff in the Medical School have occurred in Fall 2016 and more concerted efforts to build systems of support should be pursued in the next academic year.

   f) Develop specific outreach plans for male identified students, as evidence shows they are the most underserved population by our office relative to campus demographics.[3] (Spring 2018)

  2. Processes & Structure

   a) Revise the SSS mission statement to centralize issues of diversity and inclusion. (Summer 2017)

   b) Conduct an external review to follow up on the Fall 2016 self-study conducted in our office. External reviewers should be identified who have experience around issues of diversity and inclusion and asked specifically to evaluate this aspect of the work of our department, including our policies and procedures. (Summer 2017)

   c) Overhaul the SSS Website. This opportunity should be used to increase transparency and directly address our departmental focus on issues of diversity and inclusion. (Summer 2017)

   d) Move from transactional to transformational. Draw on the matrix, made popular by Stephen Covey,[5] which teaches us to make more time for work which is important, but not urgent, rather than only doing work which is urgent. This is important particularly because of the reactive nature of our work. With the addition of a seventh full time staff person, room should be created in all staff roles to be proactive in relationship building, outreach, and self-education on issues related to diversity and inclusion. (Ongoing)

  3. Policies

   a) Conduct a review of all policies and procedures owned by SSS, informed by the external review, to look for unintentional impacts (structural inequity). (Begin in Summer 2017, completed in Fall 2017)

    (1) Specifically examine Medical Leaves of Absence process (partially happening as part of a current self-study of our office) to address the concerns noted in the gaps section above. Of particular note should be the question of why HUGs, and less consistently, first generation and aided students take medical leaves at higher rates?[6] What are the reasons both at the Brown and societal level which may contribute to this and, regardless, how can Brown better support students who do take medical leave given the higher rates for some members of our community?

    (2) Similarly evaluate other processes and policies in our office, assuring the effect of systems of power, privilege and oppression are taken into account.[3] In summer 2017, following the initial assessment, a timeline should be created for prioritizing and addressing concerns found.

V. Collaborations. Describe plans for collaborating with other departments/units and how resources will be leveraged across these departments/units to facilitate departmental DIAP goals.

Because of the specific nature of our work, strong relationship must be developed with other centers that support students, particular students from marginalized backgrounds (Brown Center for Students of Color, Sarah Doyle Women's Center, LGBTQ Center, Chaplains Office, SEAS, First Gen and Low-Income Center, Office of International Student & Visitor Experience, etc). SSS must honestly evaluate the strengths of our current relationships and develop concrete plans to strengthen the relationships based not on what the centers can do to support or educate us, but on how we can better serve their constituents.

VI. **Accountability**
    A. Each of the above suggestions must be assessed. Some are about individual commitments and follow through, others are departmental, and some are both.
        1. Individual commitments should be included as part of annual performance appraisal.
        2. Departmental commitments, (assessment of them and their success, as well as next steps), should be reported in the departmental annual report which should be made available to the community.
    B. In addition, explore options, such as an annual student focus group, to proactively share and solicit feedback on our progress and needed adjustments and additions to our evolving plan. A concrete plan for proactively soliciting student feedback should be in place for the 2017-2018 academic year.
    C. As relevant, report out to existing bodies (e.g. Mental Health Community Council) on an annual basis.

End Notes
1. Survey data compiled in Spring 2015 by undergraduate students on the Mental Health Community Council from students who have taken a medical leave.
2. Survey data compiled between Sept 2015 and Sept 2016 by student leave-taking coordinators from the Curricular Resource Center from students who have taken either a personal or medical leave and have returned to Brown.
3. Survey conducted in Fall 2016 of all students who had contact with SSS in the previous two years. This survey specifically asked about satisfaction with SSS around issues of diversity and inclusion and was conducted for the purpose of the is DIAP as well as the simultaneously occurring departmental self-study.
4. www.washingtonconsultinggroup.net
5. Covey, S. (2013). The 7 habits of highly effective people. New York: Simon & Schuster.
6. Enrollment data compiled from the Office of Institutional Research.