

# Synergy

## Newsletter for NASPA SAPAA Knowledge Community

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*November 2020*

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### INSIDE:

- **Welcome Letter** 2
- **Engaging Faculty and Staff  
with Living and Learning  
Communities** 3
- **Transforming Campus  
Partnerships to Foster  
Inclusion & Belonging** 9
- **Union College Class Deans** 13
- **Submission Guidelines**



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# WELCOME

**From the SAPAA Research and Scholarship Committee Co-Chairs and the Synergy Editor**

Dear SAPAA Colleagues,

We hope you are doing well during your ever-evolving shift in duties as we strive to provide an innovative and supportive collegiate experience virtually. As many of us transition to new paradigms, it is essential we recognize the impact of effective partnerships between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. It is with great excitement that we share with you the November 2020 Synergy in support of your critical work. Our goal for Synergy includes the dissemination of current research, sharing regional happenings, providing short interviews with Student Affairs and Academic Affairs partners sharing how they work together, and highlighting positions in our institutions that straddle both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Our next Synergy publication is scheduled for July, and we welcome submissions for the upcoming issue. Submission guidelines are available in this edition. We hope you find time to practice any needed self-care during this tumultuous time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mitchell A. Levy, Synergy Editor

Dr. DeMethra LaSha Bradley and Dr. Mary Wallace, Research and Scholarship Co-Chairs

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## FEATURED ARTICLE

# Engaging Faculty and Staff with Living and Learning Communities

By Lara Lomicka Anderson and Sarah Morgan Kelly

*“Serving as a Preston Associate allows you to meet and engage with students in a different context. You get to see them out of the classroom and get to develop longer lasting and more sustained relationships over time. The Preston Associate program [is] about creating that community with students and getting to interact with students the whole person.” – Preston Associate*

For many years, the presence of faculty and staff in Living and Learning Communities (LLCs) has been widespread in higher education institutions in the US. Although some faculty may not consider it their place to interact with students outside of the classroom (Cohan, 2017), research has shown that there are clear benefits to this informal interaction. Recent research has documented the impact of faculty involvement to the success of living and learning communities (Inkelas et al., 2018; Eidum et al., 2020). When faculty and staff work together to offer a wide spectrum of experiences (social events, service work, off campus events), there are potential gains to student learning (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Furthermore, the importance of faculty-student interactions both inside and outside of the classroom has been well documented American higher education (Cox et al., 2010). Moreover, intentional interaction can both enhance and enrich traditional classroom experiences while providing focused intellectual exchange outside of the classroom.

Some positive outcomes linked to faculty-student interaction include higher grade point average (Anaya & Cole, 2001), increased persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977), self-reports of learning (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004), plans for graduate study (Hathaway et al., 2002), more social integration (Schwitzer et al., 1999), and increased critical thinking, cognitive complexity, appreciation for liberal learning (Inkelas, et al., 2008). It has also been shown that faculty mentoring is more valuable than that of peers (Mann, 1992) and that faculty serve as important role models for students (Komarraju et al., 2010). While the quality of interaction in higher education is important, more focused interaction can have a higher impact on knowledge acquisition and skill development (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

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Faculty and staff can hold different types of roles in living and learning communities. They can serve as intellectual leaders (sometimes referred to as faculty principals, faculty heads, faculty directors, or senior fellows) and as mentors/role models (sometimes referred to as fellows, faculty/staff associates, or affiliates). Common practices of faculty and staff roles within an LLC can include those that are academic and intellectual (holding office hours, providing academic mentoring, teaching courses, giving talks/presentations, leading field trips related to expertise, organizing colloquium, participating in assessment, training, orientation, application review), as well as practices that are experiential and participatory (involvement in community life, intentional and active participation with students, mentoring, attending events, activities, programs, sharing meals with students, cultivating traditions). Dr. Jill Stratton, in a recent podcast (Morgan, 2020), discussed the importance of “getting to know Associates by name and story” and suggests including students’ voices in identifying faculty and staff who might be a good fit for the community to serve as Associates. Perceived benefits of faculty and staff engagement in LLCs has led the staff at Preston Residential College at the University of South Carolina to develop a strong engagement model with faculty and staff for its residents.

Since its inception in 1995, Preston Residential College has recognized the importance of faculty involvement in LLCs. As a result, the University of South Carolina now has 7 faculty-led communities as well as other thematic living and learning residential spaces. For the purposes of this spotlight, we will highlight Preston Residential College, which has prioritized an established Associate program involving both faculty and staff for more than two decades.

Preston’s Associate model engages students in interaction with faculty and staff outside of the classroom. In its early years of development, there was little to no formality in the Associates program. Only faculty were invited to serve as Associates, from an invitation of the faculty principal. These faculty were not trained nor were they oriented to the residential college, and their only expectation was to dine with students once per week in the Preston Dining Room. At the time, appointed faculty members were afforded a lifetime appointment as Associates, were mostly affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences, and usually were retired or close to retirement.

Today, the Preston Associates program has evolved and has transformed in many ways. Preston Associates now include both University of South Carolina faculty and staff. This purposeful change happened in 2010, as a way to include other stakeholders of the university community in the program (the Office of Undergraduate Research, Study Abroad, the Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning, the Leadership and Service Center, as well as the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs). In the sections that follow we will discuss different components of the Associate program: appointments, orientation, residential dining, events, adopt-an-associate, programming, bingo, adopt a resident mentor, and recognition.

**Appointments:** Invitations for Preston Associates are annual and renewable. Potential Associates are vetted from recommendations from current Associates, current Preston students, and existing

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relationships with the Preston Leadership Team. An introductory meeting and tour with the Faculty Principal and Senior Assistant Principal allows for potential Associates to gain a better understanding of what a residential college is, what the role of the Preston Associate is, and what Preston Residential College has to offer University of South Carolina students. After that initial meeting, potential Associates are asked to answer three questions:

1. Why would you be a good fit for the Preston Associates program?
2. How can you make a difference in our community?
3. Why should we select you as one of our Associates?

**Orientation:** Successful applicants are invited to a mandatory orientation at the beginning of their first semester with Preston, and the beginning of each academic year after that. The required orientation allows for new Associates to meet one another, as well as returning Associates, who attend orientation in the Fall semester only. This orientation permits Preston to share an overview of the Preston community, meet the Preston Leadership Team, understand the expectations of Preston Associates, learn about the incentives in the Preston Associates program, hear about new initiatives, and have time to network with one another.

**Residential Dining:** Preston Associates are expected to join students at the residential dining facility once a week throughout the academic year. These meals are supported by the Preston budget, and are automatically loaded on faculty/staff University ID. During these dinners, Associates are encouraged to interact with students to help them become accustomed to engaging with faculty and staff in a different way than they are used to. Conversations over dinner can be academic or career focused, or can be topical or related to non-academic shared interests. Many Associates find themselves joining students for dinner on the same night of the week, and meet with the same students week after week, which allows for more continuity in interactions and relationship building.

**Events:** Associates are also asked to attend at least two Preston-sponsored events each semester, and swipe their University ID at each event, so their attendance can be recorded. Associates have joined residents for events such as a chocolate tasting, and a women's basketball game. Swiping for attendance is helpful for Preston Residential College, as well as University of South Carolina Housing because it is helpful to our annual assessment and budget preparation. Associate photos and biographies are featured on the Preston website, as well as in the weekly newsletter.

**Adopt-an-Associate:** The Preston Associate model also includes an Adopt-an-Associate program, wherein interested residents can sign up to be purposefully paired with an Associate. While all Associates are expected to meet and interact with Preston residents, the Adopt-an-Associate program allows for a more personal and continuous one-on-one relationship. The Associate/student matches can be based on common academic interests, personal activities, or compatible personalities. Associate and student matches are made by the Faculty Principal and Senior Assistant Principal. Students find these matches provide important mentoring and humanize the Associate experience: "Dr. W. helped me find my voice. She is an inspiration to young women to understand that they are strong and can conquer

whatever comes their way. Her dinner conversations have blown me away because we are able to talk about tough topics, but still end with a laugh.”

**Programming Associates** also are encouraged to share their passions with the students. Associates have taught residents how to quilt (and produced their own quilts), have found opportunities to hire students for internships, and worked side by side in promoting voter registration. Recently, Associates hosted Disney Sing-alongs, a Chinese dumpling cooking class, and another pair of Associates joined residents for a game night.

**Bingo:** We also make available an Adopt-an-Associate bingo containing a list of potential activities to help strengthen their relationship, including attending campus events together, inviting the student to sit in on a class or office hours, or teaching each other something new. Students in a pair who complete five activities with their Associate are rewarded with a small prize.



**Preston Residential College**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Submit

Your Name:  Name of Associate:

| B  | I   | N   | G   | O   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Hand write a thank you note to the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>  | Attend a Community Dinner with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Give the Associate a tour of Preston <input type="checkbox"/>   | Ask the Associate who else might make a great Associate <input type="checkbox"/>          | Participate in a shared interest or hobby with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>               |
| Post a picture of you and the Associate <input type="checkbox"/><br>completing one these activities to our social media <input type="checkbox"/> | Attend PDining with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                                | Spend time in the Preston library with the Associate, playing a game or reading a book <input type="checkbox"/> | Teach the Associate something new <input type="checkbox"/>                                | Attend a FEDEX with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| Attend an athletic event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>   | Participate in a Preston event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                | <b>FREE SPACE!</b> <input type="checkbox"/>   | Invite another resident to join you and the Associate for a meal <input type="checkbox"/> | Ask the Associate about their research or professional interests <input type="checkbox"/>           |
| You choose the event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/><br><input type="text"/>   | Sit in on an Associate's class or office hours (with permission) <input type="checkbox"/> | Participate in a service event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                                      | Attend an athletic event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                      | Ask the Associate how they serve as a leader on campus or in the community <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attend Italian Ice with Associates or Mix and Mingle with Associates <input type="checkbox"/>  | Try the "Take an Associate" to lunch program <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Send the Associate an email to check in and see how their week is going <input type="checkbox"/>                | Share an interesting article or video with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>         | Attend a university event with the Associate <input type="checkbox"/>                               |

**Adopt a Resident Mentor:** The most recent update to the Associates program involves matching one or two Associates with each Resident Mentor (otherwise known as Resident Assistants or Community Assistants), a student Housing employee who oversees a group of about 25 Preston residents. This

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match ideally will coincide with the academic interests of the RM and allows for Associates to get to know a manageable sized group of students. RMs invite their Associates to hall dinners and events. The Associate's picture is also posted in each RM hall.

Recognition: At the end of each academic year, all Associates receive a recognition of service certificate signed by the Preston Faculty Principal, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. They also attend a special lunch with Preston's Faculty Principal and staff. At Preston's annual banquet and awards ceremony, the Associate of the Year Award is presented, based on feedback from residents, as well as observations from the Preston Leadership Team. Finally, Associates are asked to self-evaluate their performance throughout the year, and this information is used during Associate re-application reviews.

By making purposeful updates to the Preston Residential College Associates program, University of South Carolina faculty and staff are offered a unique way to interact with undergraduate students outside of the classroom. One Associate commented: "I enjoyed getting to know the students, staff, and other Associates. This was a rare and fabulous opportunity for me to learn, socialize, and have fun with others outside of my immediate academic department." Having a greater (but manageable) population of undergraduate students to interact with has been a positive addition to the existing Associates program. On a recent survey, the majority (80%) of Associates reported that the Adopt-an-Associate program was an easy way to get to know a resident better, and also allowed them to interact with undergraduate students in a different way. Residents also appreciated these matches. One student responded: "We would eat dinner together in our dining facility at least once a month to catch up and so she could make sure I was doing okay. She was so supportive and kind to me and it definitely made my transition to college easier."

For the past 25 years, interaction with Associates has provided a meaningful and enriching way to engage in intellectual exchange out of the classroom. Preston's Associate Program that connects with faculty and staff from many different colleges and programs has helped to make Preston's program unique and beneficial to students.

For additional information about the Associate Program at Preston Residential College, visit [www.sc.edu/preston](http://www.sc.edu/preston).

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Sarah Kelly is a first-generation student who earned a BA in English from the University of Tampa and a MS in higher education administration from Florida State University. She is a founding member of the Residential College Society, serves as the RCS Media and Marketing Editor, and Chair for the 2020 Residential College Symposium.

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# Transforming Campus Partnerships to Foster Inclusion & Belonging

**Monica N. Burnette, Ph.D., Associate Vice President & Chief of Staff, Student Services and Shawna Cooper-Gibson, Ed.D., Vice President, Student Services**  
Seton Hall University



**Monica N. Burnette, Ph.D.**, has over 20 years of Student Affairs experience ranging from admissions to academic support and advising in public and private institutions. She is currently responsible for divisional operations, strategic planning, outcomes assessments, professional development projects, departmental supervision, and special student success initiatives. She is also an adjunct faculty member in the graduate education leadership and management program at Seton Hall.

**Shawna Cooper-Gibson, Ed.D.**, has over 20 years of Student Affairs experience and is a member of the Seton Hall Executive Cabinet, overseeing seventeen departments within Student Services, including five main areas: Wellbeing and Support, Academic Success, Engagement & Central Administration, Public Safety & Security. She serves as the Co-Chair of several University Committees, including Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Council for Student Success, and the Health Intervention and Communication Team.



## Introduction

As we continue to grapple with civil unrest across our national cities and towns, higher education institutions are in the middle of two major pandemics— COVID-19 and racial injustice. As universities continue to respond to the threat of COVID-19 higher education must also help lead society to overcome and condemn racism and violence.

A sense of inclusion and belonging is vital for healthy campus communities, increased student success, and the training of global leaders (Strayhorn, 2012). An engaged, supportive campus climate requires a deep focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI) to improve positive college outcomes and a sense of belonging for faculty, employees, and students (Kuh et al., 2011; Tinto, 2010). Both a nurturing campus climate and sense of belonging are key factors in employee and student satisfaction and persistence (Bess & Dee, 2012)

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At Seton Hall University in New Jersey, our Catholic mission is one of peace and justice, recognizing the dignity of all. This summer, as many of us were entrenched in our response to the global pandemic, Seton Hall senior leadership also acknowledged the need for accelerated action to enhance our campus DEI efforts. The first official University committee focusing on diversity and inclusion initiatives was established in 2018. Through leadership transitions, the existing Committee was transformed. Now co-chaired by the Vice President of Student Services and the Chair of the Faculty Senate, Seton Hall's re-established Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee's goal is to create a sustained, cross-functional partnership model for advancing DEI through collaboration, coordination, and communication. This approach is framed in ACPA & NASPA's (2010) professional competencies for social justice and inclusion, which encourages full and mutual group participation and integration of DEI work with actionable goals.

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Virtual Retreat

In July 2020, the DEI Committee hosted its first integrated four-hour virtual retreat for Committee members. The purpose of the retreat was to align goals with the University's vision to cultivate and nurture a trusting and collaborative community to advance DEI on campus and beyond. The retreat provided a time for dialogue and self-reflection and focused on increasing cultural competency and engaging with difference, while building strong partnerships and enhanced campus collaboration. Participants listened and shared personal experiences, identified current strengths and opportunities within their departments, developed micro-strategies and action steps, discussed best practices, and generated ideas for assessment and evaluation. The DEI Committee used Microsoft Teams to facilitate the event. "Channels" were used to host two concurrent breakout sessions, and the Committee encouraged the use of the "chat" and "hand" functions for participants to raise questions, enable comments, and enrich the discussion. Notetakers and facilitators were designated throughout the retreat for accountability and organization.

### **Collaboration**

*"There are areas for collaboration within the institution, and we are working diligently to address them in a synergistic way." - Participant's response in post-retreat assessment*

Researchers suggest a supportive campus climate that fosters belonging and inclusion "does not exist in a vacuum or [is] independent of other policies and practices" (Kuh et al., 2010, p. 242). Campus collaboration is essential to provide a supportive campus environment, and the benefits of organizational collaboration include greater productivity and coordination (Kanter, 1994). Synergistic partnerships between campus constituents, including academic and student affairs, is vital to building DEI efforts and a supportive campus environment.

Forty-six faculty, administrators, staff, and students participated in the DEI Virtual Retreat. Participants included undergraduate and graduate students, new and seasoned staff, College deans,

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department chairs, institute directors, tenured and adjunct faculty, Executive Cabinet, and administrators from across the University, including the Offices of the Provost, Enrollment Management, Campus Ministry, and Student Services.

## **Communication**

*“For me, the sharing of resources and a place to go to readily find them has been really helpful. I also have appreciated hearing the voices of so many people I don’t usually get to interact with from administrators, staff, and students.” - Participant’s response in post-retreat assessment*

Effective communication around DEI efforts requires trust and transparency. Okoro & Washington (2012) suggest that effective internal and external organizational communication is essential for sustainable growth, productivity, and performance. With a growing trend of increased diversity and intercultural relationships in the workplace, interpersonal and group communication is also vital for organizational success (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

Critical self-reflection and identifying strengths and challenges of current DEI efforts were main components of the virtual retreat. Participants voluntarily completed an anonymous questionnaire developed by Peggy McIntosh (1988) called “Daily Effects of White Privilege.” A community agreement derived from the Ceceilyn Miller Institute for Leadership and Diversity in America (2020) set the framework for open and honest dialogue. Participants were asked to listen wholeheartedly and speak from their own experiences while paying attention to their own thoughts, feelings, or biases.

## **Coordination**

*“[I will be] intentionally inclusive in program planning and development, and better leverage[e] existing resources to support DEI efforts.” - Participant’s response in post-retreat assessment*

The DEI retreat also focused on streamlining and assessing existing DEI initiatives to improve consistency and avoid duplicating efforts. Kezar (2005) suggests the benefits of organizational coordination include greater efficiency and effectiveness. In support of one action item from the retreat, the DEI Committee aimed to create subcommittees (co-led by faculty and administrators) to sustain and advance the ongoing work.

The academic affairs subcommittee will review curricular revisions and innovations to examine diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. A subcommittee focused on programming will be charged with building on existing extracurricular programs and initiatives. A community training subcommittee will establish and assess effective training programs to increase cultural and intercultural competency and fluency. A subcommittee dedicated to policy and procedures will review existing processes to ensure equity among all campus constituents. A communication subcommittee will manage and coordinate DEI programs and events and manage the website and social media. Subcommittees will create and prioritize activities while setting timelines for short- and long-term goals.

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## Conclusion

An online evaluation was administered after the DEI retreat. Of the 46 participants, 26% responded to the survey. Overall, all respondents were either “very satisfied” (75%) or satisfied (25%) with the retreat. 83% were “very satisfied” with the self-reflection session, while 83% found the breakout sessions effective. When asked how respondents would incorporate the knowledge from the DEI retreat into their work moving forward, respondents responded positively, noting the need for purposeful programming and transparent communication to create a trusting and supportive culture.

The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Virtual Retreat was the first step in an extensive process of transforming campus partnerships to foster inclusion and belonging. Ongoing and intentional work continues to propel DEI efforts on campus. Throughout the summer and fall semester, the DEI Committee has frequently met, coordinating weekly email communication to the community to share resources and events. These include a series of panels on policing, cultural celebrations such as Hispanic Heritage Month, and promotion of anti-racist and diversity and inclusion training programs. Subcommittees continue to meet to align their plans with Seton Hall’s goals to cultivate and nurture a collaborative community.

Although there are many barriers to campus partnerships, including trust, departmental silos, bureaucracy, unions, resources, relationships, and commitment (Kezar, 2005), advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus require institutions to align efforts with strategic goals through communication, collaboration, and coordination. Campus collaboration promotes a collegial and validating culture that fosters a strong sense of belonging. An inclusive, institutional-wide approach that involves all divisions, from senior leadership in academic and student affairs to the student body, can serve as a model to enhance institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

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*Students on Campus (Seton Hall University, September 2020)*



*Presidents Hall (Seton Hall University, April 2010)*



*Fall on the Green (Seton Hall University, October 2012)*



*The Green in the Fall (Seton Hall University, October 2012)*



*An Afternoon with Dolores Huerta (Seton Hall University, October 2019)*



*Great Minds Dialogue with Catholic Charities' Sister Norma Pimentel (Seton Hall University, February 2020)*

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# Union College Class Deans

by Michele Angrist, Dean of Studies, Union College

The mission of Union College is to provide a rigorous, holistic, and immersive residential liberal education that emphasizes integration, innovation, inclusion, and reflection for every student.

Due to the growing advising and support needs of students navigating complex academic, health, or social challenges, in 2018-19 the College implemented a class dean structure. To explore the range of options, administrators visited four institutions, each with a different class dean model. We adopted a hybrid model designed to incorporate the best of all those studied. The dean of first-year students remains a resource for first-years, starting with each new class, while the other three deans progress with their classes through graduation. Recognizing that both Student Affairs responsibilities and Academic Affairs support are part of a successful class dean program, Union's structure has its class deans report to the Dean of Studies and the Dean of Students to best leverage their expertise. The Dean of Studies and the Dean of Students respectively have two direct and two indirect reports among the four class deans. All four class deans are in regular communication in multiple forums, allowing them to share information and identify systemic and data gaps in order to assist the College in bridging Student and Academic Affairs more effectively. This hybrid system has required class deans to master the information re: available resources and policies that apply on "both sides of the house" in order to serve effectively as administrators engaged in triaging and addressing the full spectrum of student issues.

Each dean has other duties as well, partially due to resource constraints. Yet there are benefits and synergies to the dual roles, as well. For example, having a class dean in charge of the Minerva Program, our innovative residential house program which brings together members of the campus community, provides a natural opportunity to communicate the value of the program to an entire class of students. Similarly, having a class dean in charge of fellowships provides an opportunity to encourage more students to apply for them. Another class dean directs the Scholars Program, providing a connection to a high achieving cohort looking for more opportunities, and the first-year dean coordinates our orientation program. These additional responsibilities give the class deans a second connection with students and the community.

One of the most important roles that class deans fulfill on campus is early intervention when students are in academic difficulty. Faculty members submit alerts online which then are automatically delivered to the corresponding class dean for action. The class dean reaches out to the student and works to help navigate the issues. This could mean a referral to counseling, health services, academic coaching, accommodative services or other resources. No student presents the exact same circumstances, therefore the class deans have to really listen and empathize with their students, serving as an advocate while also demanding accountability. The hope is that early interventions will allow students to address issues and get back on track. In our ten-week trimester schedule, there is precious little time for students to fall behind. To signal the volume involved, in Fall 2019, class deans responded to 215 academic alerts for 155 unique students. Faculty appreciate the class deans' partnership in assisting students who are struggling. Students appreciate the level of care that they have, knowing that the class dean is there to help. Going forward, Class Deans and other administrators plan to use alert data (e.g. patterns with respect to gender, class year, and term) to inform future programming and interventions.

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Now that the initiative's first student cycle is approaching completion, we plan to assess the class dean model based on student feedback about the quality of services offered, input from other campus stakeholders about the utility of the class deans' partnership, and trends in retention and degree completion. Student exit surveys, which ask students their reasons for leaving Union, will also suggest whether involvement with class deans might have led to different outcomes.

The COVID crisis, turbulent current affairs, and growing financial pressures on families compel us to do more to meet the needs of students. The class dean system has bolstered our ability to navigate difficult circumstances and assist our students effectively. It has triggered more frequent habits of collaboration and communication between academic and student affairs through the cross-divisional relationships each class dean develops, as well as through twice-per-trimester meetings of the class deans, Dean of Students, and Dean of Studies. These connections, in turn, enhanced the institution's ability to plan for and administer two very different, exceptional trimesters in Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 respectively. In our fully online spring trimester, during which all of our students studied remotely, the class deans were critical bridges to our students. They provided moral support to their cohorts, frequently calling and emailing students to check-in and wish them well. Class Deans also supported students in adjusting to online learning, establishing healthy routines at home, accessing key campus resources remotely, and navigating adjusted policy landscapes. During Summer 2020, every student had to decide whether to return to in-person classes or to study remotely for the Fall 2020 trimester. More than 200 students needed assistance in making this decision, and the class deans were deployed to reach out to and support them in that process. These conversations were not easy, but their volume indicates that the class deans have become a pivotal resource for students. This fall, class deans are working with students in COVID-related isolation or quarantine, helping these students liaise with their faculty members, continue their studies, and stay socially connected while physically apart from the community.

Chartered in 1795, Union College is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the United States. The class dean system, by contrast, is still in its infancy. We are continuing to learn ways that we can meet individual student needs and help to address community concerns by implementing a model that requires and deepens collaboration between student and academic affairs. As we continue to evolve, there is no question that this structure has enabled Union to serve our students more effectively during the current pandemic.



