

**External Review Team Final Report**  
**Office of the Dean of Students**  
**Washington State University**  
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## **Glossary of Terms**

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AVP/DOS – Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students

FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

GIESORC - Gender Identity/Expression and Sexual Orientation Resource Center

ODS – Office of the Dean of Students

VPSA – Vice President for Student Affairs

WSU – Washington State University

## Introduction and Overall Impressions

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“...the dean of students office, which typically responds to students, faculty, staff, parents, community members, and others concerned with student-related issues or concerns that arise on campus. Often this office carries the burden of helping students while establishing and enforcing both community standards and institutional standards at the same time. It also may be responsible for organizing and directing the institution’s response to student crises.”<sup>1</sup>

This report constitutes the observations and recommendations of the External Review Team for the office of the Dean of Students at Washington State University.

Stated in the mission and reinforced through conversations with campus partners is the office’s dedication to connecting “students with the services, opportunities and resources to foster their success at WSU and after graduation.”

The Review Team charge meeting with Vice President Mary Jo Gonzales, provided specific areas of interest that merited further illumination and we wanted to underscore for current and future attention.

These areas include:

- Purpose of the Office in the new leadership framework
- Structure of the Office and Staffing
  - Skills and competencies desired for the new AVP/DOS
- Branding and Messaging

These specific areas of interest were confirmed in meetings with internal and external stakeholders to the office. In addition to the areas of interest identified, the team utilized appreciative inquiry during the interviews to discover additional themes. These items and subsequent recommendations warrant additional consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Komives, S. R., & Woodard Jr, D. B. (2003). Student services: A handbook for the profession. John Wiley & Sons.

## **Role of the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students (AVP/DOS)**

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Washington State University (WSU) community members, campus-wide, respect the position of the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students due in large part to the efforts of the current interim AVP/DOS gathering credibility for the position and the Office of the Dean of Students (ODS).

Participants expressed the previous Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA), who also held the Dean of Students title, concentrated on taking care of the Division more so than being a part of the University. This perception may have negatively impacted stakeholder's view of the Dean of Student's role on campus. The new Vice President for Student Affairs has been functioning as a connector across the campus and her appointment of an interim AVP/DOS has been a positive reflection of her leadership. The current AVP/DOS continues to create a strong foundation for the next AVP/DOS. Given that the previous VPSA held both titles, it may take some time to educate the campus community on the difference in roles between the VPSA and the AVP/DOS.

### ***Attributes desired in the next AVP/DOS***

As the Division of Student Affairs searches for a permanent AVP/DOS, the reviewers gleaned information that may be of benefit in the search process. Review participants were vocal, focused, and informed regarding crucial aspects needed in the AVP/DOS role.

- Visible, Leader, Consensus Builder

Numerous participants mentioned that the interim AVP/DOS is continuously seen on campus and very involved in many aspects of University and student life; the next AVP/DOS is expected to perform similarly. The current climate changes to bring better understanding between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs also demand visibility if the relationship is to maintain growth. The role needs a person who can manage both up and down. The VPSA seeks to drive the Division into the future; many of the current employees in the Division have been with WSU for many years. As such, the incoming AVP/DOS needs to be a consensus builder while also being able to synthesize large amounts of data and cultural information to remain faithful to the newly charted direction; and all while being able to communicate with the Faculty effectively. Ultimately, the Division will resemble the highest levels of leadership if allowed; the AVP/DOS can positively impact the outcomes by aiding all merge the ideal with practical over time.

- Attention to Pullman campus and System campus issues

The reviewers discovered that entities in the WSU system operate in a variety of ways for different functions. It was difficult to determine when personnel at the other campuses considered WSU Pullman to be the standard to follow or when each campus had a specific way of operating connected to the institution's cultural needs. While it may be difficult, the incoming professional should be savvy enough to understand the intricacies in an expedited fashion.

- Utilizing Data to Demonstrate Impact

Many review participants repeatedly stated that the incoming AVP/DOS needs to understand assessment. Further, the person needs to understand when it is appropriate to share data, what data to share, the appropriate ways to share it, and all while being seen as transparent for the growth and protection of the community. Assessment may also assist the ODS in telling its story to other departments throughout the campus. Also, adequately presented data can aid both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to understand student trends in the context of both a dynamic WSU and emerging trends impacting like institutions.

- Higher Education Law and Policy

The incoming AVP/DOS should have a healthy understanding of higher education law and policy, student conduct, emerging trends connected to conflict resolution, Title IX, FERPA, First Amendment issues, and emerging trends in mental health and case management. With increased litigation and challenges to institutional rules, it is essential for the person filling the AVP/DOS position to understand when a happening is an office matter and when legal advice and protection are options at the individual or institutional levels. As the Division seeks to employ more modern tactics in working with students, an understanding of conflict resolution methods and how WSU can grow through the use of the correct methods is crucial. Current students desire more dialogue to understand the why. In the absence of dialogue and student involvement in situations of conflict, the relationships between students, families and the institution can become more adversarial and lead to increased litigation. Since 2009, campus conflict was reframed. A professional familiar with these developments can be useful. Likewise, many situations continue to exist in which adjudication is the best method of resolution; the incoming professional should be well-versed in both. With Title IX

complaints continuing to increase, the incoming AVP/DOS should have familiarity with the current laws, institutional policies, and the interim guidance. Further, the person should also be able to quickly learn the intricacies of the Washington Administrative Procedures Act as well. As mental health concerns remain prevalent on college campuses, either having a functional knowledge of the literature or the ability to build a productive relationship with student health and campus mental health professionals is crucial.

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, inclusion surfaced many times during the review process; however, it surfaced most passionately with students from underrepresented backgrounds. As WSU desires to increase campus diversity in many ways, it is essential for the incoming AVP/DOS and their staff to understand cultural competence, student development, and have the ability to establish common ground between diverse populations of students while respecting students' rights under freedom of speech and expression. In short, the incoming professional should be a compassionate individual who appreciates diversity and inclusion, possesses the necessary hard skills pertinent to the position, can build campus relationships, can stand their ground in times requiring strength, lead efforts can analyze existing policies and protocols for systemic biases, champion staff training, and have the desire to learn divisional and campus cultures that are still forming.

- Emergency/Crisis Management

The AVP/DOS is expected to be a key player, if not the point person, when managing campus emergencies and crisis. A strong candidate should have knowledge and experience working in an emergency/crisis management framework. They should be astute in knowing when and what information to push up to Division and University leadership and how to utilize communication chains to keep staff and key campus constituents informed.

### **Aligning the title with responsibilities**

One crucial aspect for the VPSA to articulate is the dual title of the position. The two titles suggest that this individual is expected to not only carry out the traditional functions of a Dean of Students (crisis response, behavioral intervention, student conduct) but as an Associate Vice President have oversight over additional functional areas (Fraternity & Sorority Life and Residence Life) and, in conjunction with the other AVPs, contribute to the strategic leadership of the Division including representing the VPSA on university committees and leading cross

division initiatives, and serving in the absence of the VPSA when needed. This distinction can be important when deciding what units are reporting to this individual in a DOS capacity versus an AVP capacity. There may be some units that are serving more in line with a DOS function, and thus the leaders of these units may have assistant/associate dean titles and expectations in addition to their director responsibilities. However, there may be some merit in directors of larger units to report to their person in their AVP capacity. For illustration purposes, the associate dean and director of the Center of Fraternity and Sorority Life may be asked to work on parent programs as an initiative out of the ODS. The Director of Residence Life may be asked to work on strengthening student affairs and academic affairs collaborations, which is more of a Division initiative being carried out under the direction of the AVP role.

### **Functions of the Office of the Dean of Students (ODS)**

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Over the course of the interviews with internal and external stakeholders, the Office of the Dean of Students was constantly referred to “as the place you go if you don’t know what to do.” Many expressed that it was the place you referred students to go if you did not know how to help the student or if you there were so many intertwined issues that the student needed a little more care and assistance navigating an issue. Staff in the office, including the current Dean, are seen as compassionate, knowledgeable individuals, who are passionate about their work.

As new generations of students enroll on campus, it will be imperative to look at how the office will continue to do their work to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body with different needs. Campuses are seeing an increase of students arriving on campus with greater mental health issues including anxiety and depression. Helping students evolve skills and competencies around coping, resiliency, and grit have become more commonplace on campus.

The functions of the office at WSU are similar to other Dean of Student’s offices at peer institutions. Although there is not one prescribed structure to a DOS office, there are some similar functions that are usually under the DOS umbrella. In this section, we will explore the current functions of the office and recommendations for each.

#### Opportunities

- Consider rebranding the office to include the other important functions

As the office proceeds with setting a vision, mission, and goals it is recommended that they consider a rebranding of the name of the office to better reflect the variety of

functions and move away from naming it after a position. Similar offices at other institutions are referred to the office of “campus life” or “student life”. From a larger strategy perspective, broadening the name of the office allows leadership to place future initiatives in the office that fit within the AVP portfolio but not necessarily the DOS traditional portfolio.

- Revisit Vision, Mission, Goals in the context of DSA and University

Given the unique history of the Dean of Student title/office at WSU and new expectations from the Vice President for Student Affairs, the office must explore and redefine its core vision, mission, and purpose. The reviewers were provided a one-page fact sheet on the office of the DOS which explained the role and purpose of the office:

“The WSU Office of the Dean of Students connects students with the services, opportunities, and resources to foster their success at WSU and after graduation. By working with university and community partners, we advise students about services, resources, and options that support their success and provide guidance and assistance during times of challenge, crisis, complexity or emergency.”

While this statement captures the case management role of the office, there may be opportunities to capture more of what the office encompasses in the statement. As the both the Division and University are changing in scope and direction, ODS's will as well. Even more, the reviewers were told numerous times of the desire for ODS to be involved in proactive education rather than strictly reactive in its work with students. Divisional leadership, ODS staff, and critical faculty may be needed to assist in better understanding the role of ODS.

- Create a Strategic Plan

Creating a 3-5 year strategic plan can help provide a framework for growth and evolution of the office. This can be completed in conjunction with defining the vision/mission or as a separate exercise. The reviewers understand ODS never had a strategic plan. In speaking to ODS staff and other professionals, there may not be time to focus on such a plan based on the current staffing levels; however, the actual office needs may be called to change for further effectiveness. Afterward, the campus touchpoints (i.e., website, print media, and social media) will need to reflect the direction through the process of rebranding.

### ***Students of Concern & Case Management***

By far when speaking with stakeholders, this is the most notable responsibility of the office. Current staff has developed a strong, positive reputation for the working with students who are exhibiting behaviors of concern. Faculty and staff do not hesitate to contact the office to refer a student or to consult on how to handle student behavior issues.

The CARE Team and AWARE Network are a strength of the office and provide a strong network of collaborators across the campus and at system locations. Users of the AWARE Network commented on the timeliness and excellent quality of response by the DOS staff to reports. DOS staff do a great job “coaching” faculty and staff on how to manage lower level issues.

### **Opportunities**

- Proactively inform the key campus stakeholders on student issues.

The Dean of Students is in a unique position to inform campus stakeholders, with attention to University and academic leaders, about what they are seeing on the WSU campus and any issues that are affecting students nationally. One or two page, visually stimulating, data on case management files (in aggregate) which including demographics and categorization by the issue should be reviewed and distributed annually. Data should also be reviewed longitudinally to look for trends and areas of proactive interventions. These data can be combined with other units such as counseling, health center, disability services, etc. to keep leadership informed of issues and, if needed, as a way to justify provisioning of new resources or reallocation of existing resources. If cell size does not compromise privacy, unit specific data can be shared with academic units and other specialized populations (graduate students, international students, etc.) to determine if demographic specific interventions may mitigate incidents. This information may also be of interest to community partners including local PD and local mental health agencies/non-profits.

### ***Emergency and Crisis Management***

The Dean of Students and staff are often looked to lead or assist during a campus emergency or crisis. Several stakeholders commented that the DOS and other student affairs staff played a pivotal role in the recent high-profile student death and campus protest on campus. Currently, the office of the DOS is also responsible for the student affairs on-call rotation.

### Opportunities

- Clarify roles of the DOS/AVP and others during a campus emergency or crisis.

The Division leadership team has gone through significant change in the past two years. A new VPSA has put into place a new, multiple AVP structure. As such, it is recommended to take some time with the leadership team and walk through a variety of emergency (weather, fire, etc.) and crisis (protests, social media attacks, etc.) to determine who is responsible for managing the response and how communication should flow for an effective and efficient response.

- Review charge and membership of the on-call team, CIRT team, BART, and CARE team and how they interact (or don't)

There may be some efficiencies to be gained by looking at the charges of each of these teams and/or an articulation for the merit of continuing current structure. As alluded to in the bullet above, it may also prove beneficial to see how these teams interact and/or overlap with other crisis response team (e.g. BART) in the Division. Presently, there is some confusion as to who and/or what team should be mobilizing to respond to incidents.

### ***Responding to Parent/Family Member Concerns***

The DSO and reporting units have high interaction with parents and family members. They consistently partner with family members to be part of their student's success. The DSO works with many family members as they are managing student cases, the Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life works with family members of students in their communities and many alumni legacies, Student Conduct works with family members of students who are complainants or respondents, and Residence Life is handling complaints and issues from family members of students living in their facilities.

Currently, working with parents/family members is a distributed function found spread throughout several areas within and outside of the Division. The primary connection with parents and family members appears to reside in the Office of New Student Programs where parent and family members are invited to be part of new student orientation and can sign up to receive a parent and family newsletter.

### Opportunities

- Increase accessibility of the ODS to family members.

Help family members see the ODS as a “go to” office when they have a concern about their student or a place to start if they don’t know to whom they should address questions. Washington State University is a large institution and the ODS is in a prime position to help family members beyond the first year.

- Strengthen relationship with the office of New Student Programs (NSP) to develop an intentional curriculum on supporting family members.

Given the large student body, it will take more than one unit to serve and garner the support of family members to support student success. Strengthening the partnership with NSP may help in crafting messages for parents/family members based on information being gathered in the DOS. In addition, an intentional plan can be developed to ensure a soft hand-off between offices when requests go beyond the role and scope of staff in NSP.

- Create a University-wide task force to explore strengthening using parents/family members as partners in student success.

The institution may benefit from a short-term task force who can perform an environmental scan and identify areas of strengths and opportunities related to parent/family member involvement. This type of initiative (and perhaps resulting initiatives) could be chaired by one of the assistant or associate deans of students. If it is determined that the ODS will take on these new initiatives, resources (human and/or financial) should be allocated to support the development and implementation.

### ***Documentation, Data, and Protocols***

The ODS is responsible for a variety of processes, protocols, and records management in the scope of their responsibilities including the student death response process, emergency protocols, and CARE Team records management. Although these processes have been effective in the past, with new leadership on board, there is some opportunity to create written protocols used to guide and review practices.

- Prioritize protocols to be written/updated

Reviewers were provided with a lengthy list identified by the ODS of protocols/policies that need to be written or updated. The list can be overwhelming, thus, it is recommended that they be sorted by priority. Reviewers have recommended which policies should be tackled first based on feedback from interview participants (Appendix B).

- Clarify the role and purpose of the Student Affairs On-Call staff and clarify communication protocols

Interview participants expressed a desire to have more protocols and expectations around the Student Affairs on call process (i.e. who has the duty phone). There was some confusion on how/when to involve the AVP/DOS versus the VPSA, especially when it was another AVP on-call. Questions remain as to when the on-call person have the authority to make decisions on their own and when should they consult with the AVP/DOS.

- Utilize data to improve messaging

Students and personnel repeatedly indicated a desire to understand the campus impact of ODS better. They expressed a desire to have pertinent data released to community members to understand campus trends better. ODS could use data to show the positive impact in the areas of advocacy, community building efforts, enforcement of community standards, and general student support.

### **Staffing in the Office of the Dean of Students**

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WSU and the Division of Student Affairs have expressed that the Office of the Dean of Students is young in the institution's history. Though WSU was founded in 1890, the concept of the current ODS did not come to fruition until 2009. Even so, the current configuration of ODS does not resemble what the office was tasked to be before the most recent restructuring. The reviewers also believe it fair to say that, even currently, ODS's campus connection points are cloudy in the minds of many professionals and students. A lack of understanding could be caused campus community members remembering the responsibilities of those who occupied the Dean of Students (DOS) position before the current DOS; especially since the position was formerly joined with the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) role and also connected to Cougar Health. It was only recently that the current VPSA made the focus of ODS specific to Fraternity and Sorority Life, Student Conduct, and Residence Life.

Participants mentioned, more than a few times, that ODS office is primarily the product of "homegrown" personnel. While this is not positive or negative, the reviewers believe the present actions of the staff influence the current and upcoming states of change. The VPSA mentioned her desire to move ODS operations from those mimicking past practices to those ushering in future practices; moving from the year 2000 to the year 2030 in approach. The current ODS team wishes to support the VPSA while acknowledging ODS staff members may be waiting for instruction for fear of making a mistake. As many staff members have been with WSU for years, WSU's past compared to its future is leading to second-guessing and stagnation.

Further, the leadership of the Division of Student Affairs seems to desire more of a community-building and partnership model coming from ODS; an approach that is proactive in meeting the general student population where they are. Many stated that the interim DOS also embodies this approach from a positional standpoint. Further, the reviewers believe that ODS currently functions under a student assistance model that is more reactive. In short, ODS, currently, has a confusion around identity.

Participants hold ODS staff in high regards. ODS staff were described as the driving forces behind an "empathic office" while displaying deep care and passion for serving students. The staff was tagged continuously as problem solvers and, despite ODS being understaffed, they were applauded for their workload while managing their workload very well and going above and beyond for students. Maintaining confidentiality was also seen as a strong suit for employees in ODS. ODS staff were labeled helpful in informing the community on ODS functions. The reviewers noted that ODS staff makes themselves available to present to campus stakeholders upon request and also presenting during a variety of campus functions when invited to do so. Moreover, with all of the campus impacts the current staff have on the community, participants remarked that the staff could do more if the office workload did not exceed the staff's capacity because they display institutional knowledge that transcends the confines of their stated roles.

The most common observation given in the majority of meetings with review participants is that ODS is understaffed. While the current staff is functioning at a high level, many fear that the accuracy and speed needed in the current iteration of ODS will lead to burnout and limit professional growth. Further, professionals expressed slow filling vacancies if hires happen at all. Staff mentioned the previously stated point as endemic to DSA as many other offices have experienced the same. Therefore, some feel that being understaffed creates one type of pressure while a different pressure comes from not knowing if the situation will change.

## Opportunities

- Clarify job descriptions and roles of the staff in the ODS

Currently, the reviewers believe there is an opportunity for job descriptions and roles for ODS staff to be clarified and updated. Because some positions remain open, there is a chance that many positions may have developed role creep; while an expanded role may be necessary for the short term, over time, it may not be beneficial to the team. As a new AVP/DOS onboards, it is recommended they take some time to evaluate the responsibilities of staff in the office. There may be some potential, prior to filling all vacant positions, to ensure that the current staff is “sitting in the right seats on the bus”. Some shifting of responsibilities may allow current staff to bring more of their strengths into their work.

- Clarify job descriptions and roles of the assistant/associate DOS as they relate to work of the ODS.

It was not clear to the reviewers if/how the Assistant/Associate Dean of Students (ADOS) helped with the work in the Office of the Dean of Students. It was assumed that since they carried both a director and ADOS title they would have some direct function in the ODS in addition to being directors of their functional areas. There seemed to be some difficulty articulating this distinction, even amongst the ADOS themselves. As a comparison with other institutions, many times these directors may have some direct responsibilities that help carry out some of the functions of the ODS including on-call rotations, case management functions, leading committees or task forces on behalf of the DOS, etc. In any case, it should be clearly articulated and written in job descriptions. A better understanding of the Associate Dean of Students role in comparison to the DOS role is also necessary for better efficiency. There are many ways to structure the reporting units under the Dean of Students, Appendix C provides just a couple of examples of how the office can be structured.

- Consider additional staffing

Many of the constituents interviewed expressed some concern that a growing case load and increased expectations of visibility and outreach cannot be met with current staffing levels. At a base level, there still may need to be an increase in ODS staffing, even at a lower level, to decrease the wait time for students who desire a meeting with

ODS staff. Granted most students demand a meeting with the DOS; however, if someone in the office can address the student's concern, and students also understand that setting a meeting with the DOS may take longer, students may still be able to get served.

### **Creating Inclusive Environments and Equitable Practices**

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Overall, the review team noticed the desire from the University President, the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) and the staff in the Office of the Dean of Students (ODS) to promote both equity and inclusion through both feel and practices. Professional staff, both inside and outside of the Division of Student Affairs, acknowledged the attempts at achieving equity and inclusion through understanding the intricacies involved in various components of case management. Staff also acknowledged the current Dean of Students' desire to be open and accepting of all students regardless of class and background and the ODS staff displaying a desire to appreciate diversity to include international students.

Conversely, students mentioned perceived dissonance regarding the areas of equity and inclusion in the current climate. While some students stated feeling connected to cultures of Student Affairs and the ODS, other students differed in opinion. Specifically, students from historically underrepresented backgrounds who were interviewed stated feeling that the ODS was hostile to them. For example, the students expressed that students of color received harsher sanctions connected to responsible findings. While Student Conduct staff refuted this assumption with evidence from a previous study, the students passionately stated their beliefs. These students also believed that many of their interactions with the ODS were related to allegations of misconduct and not connected to the advocacy components of the office leading to a negative perception of the office. While students suggested the current Dean of Students is interested in improving the overall student experience, they feel that historically underrepresented students continue to foster discontent attached to feelings of vulnerability during racially charged campus events. They are not confident in the support being provided by the university and feel they are on their own to fix their own problems and support themselves.

Further, students expressed perceived harassment of both undocumented students and students of color and that the ODS is slow to investigate these allegations when reported. These feelings continue to negatively impact their relationships with ODS and their perception of feeling safe on campus. Despite efforts to establish the ODS as the "go to" unit for to address student concerns, graduate and professional students expressed that they would more likely go to the Graduate School to resolve issues or seek assistance. International students interviewed

stated feeling a closer connection with international student office regarding the handling of their concerns.

Campus partners echoed concerns that current practices may not take into account the inequitable impact on first-generation students. For example, when a student is struggling with personal or academic issues, they are encouraged to withdraw from the institution to give them time to address these issues prior to returning. This advice may have harsher consequences on first-generation students due to the higher risk of them not returning once they step away due many times to lack of family support or means to return.

### Opportunities

- Provide space and resources to further educate ODS staff on diversity, inclusion, and equity issues

Due to the rapidly changing research around supporting and serving the next generation of college students. Time and resources should be allocated to allow ODS staff (and all DSA staff) to remain up to date on current research and best, evidence-based practices. Building on the current foundational knowledge of staff will allow for the formation of new lenses through which to view ODS messaging and inform how current protocols and practices may impact first-generation and historically underrepresented students differently when compared to majority students. Training can also give staff new strategies on how to interact with diverse student populations. There is also merit in inviting academic affairs colleagues in this training.

- Find more opportunities to connect historically underrepresented students with the ODS.
- It is important that the ODS find ways to 1) hear diverse student voices and 2) find positive opportunities to connect students with the ODS. There are a multitude of ways this can occur, including but not limited to the creation of an advisory committee, comprised of both students and staff focused on understanding and improving campus climate in the areas of access, equity, and inclusion and how ODS can positively contribute to change. This committee can serve to inform policy, practices, and protocols that are inclusive and equitable and help students on the committee understand how the ODS is currently serving all students. Increase commitment to hiring staff from diverse backgrounds

As the number of students from diverse backgrounds increases, the visible diversity of staff could increase so that students see themselves in the professionals partnering with them.

- Utilize existing experts and relationships in the Division

The Division of Student Affairs is home to a number of units that have the experience and expertise of working with students from historically marginalized groups. The ODS should collaborate and form closer working relationships with areas such as Multicultural Student Services (MSS), ACCESS center, GIESORC, etc. to access, and build trust, with students who see these areas as their sole source of support. DSA staff in all areas should feel comfortable referring students back and forth. Staff in ODS should also utilize the expertise and lenses that staff working in these areas can bring when formulating, reviewing, and revising policies, practices, and protocols to help ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion and mitigate systemic bias.

### **Communication, Branding, and Messaging**

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Offices and departments of college campuses have an opportunity to control their narratives in a myriad of ways. Websites, print media, social media, and word-of-mouth from those with previous interactions with the entity. Specific to the Dean of Students offices across the country, specifically those that house the Student Conduct function, the office perception of a place to avoid even if there are supportive functions present may exist. The reviewers noticed both challenges and opportunities.

Regarding challenges, it is important to note the following, as many students and families become familiar with departments and offices through the orientation process, many participants offered that ODS does not have a prominent station or role in New Student Orientation. Specifically, participants offered that New Student Orientation staff shows ODS last on tour. Furthermore, ODS was stated to receive a short introduction and while being referred to as the office that handles issues of concern. If accurate, this does not aid ODS in refuting the "principal's office" designation. Introductions of this sort do not fully encapsulate other resources ODS should be known for offering resulting in potentially missed opportunities.

#### Opportunities

- Improve communication efforts through website and social media.

Overall, ODS can do a better job of owning its narrative. In many cases, a department's website is the most common access point for students and families. Currently, the information regarding the functions of the office are present; however, how and why the office interacts with students is not evident. Increased attention to the website could positively impact the student/family introduction to the office. Furthermore, the general web presence through social media accounts (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) can be used with increased frequency to ensure greater student connectivity.

- Involve students in message creation and delivery

ODS can partner with student organizations to display the resources available to students from a student perspective. As students listen to other students' experiences as a way to inform their perceptions, such opportunities could function as positive indirect marketing for ODS.

- Clarify and Communicate the Structure of ODS

There is still confusion as to what is considered part of the Office of the Dean of Students. Clarification as to whether the Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life and Residence Life are under the ODS purview or are they separate units that report to the AVP/DOS. In addition, more marketing can be done to emphasize the resource and student assistance services functions of the ODS to mitigate the "principal's office only" designation.

- Sharing information with key stakeholder.

ODS can solidify itself as a campus partner by anticipating and sharing appropriate information with other key entities. Departments such as Athletics and the WSU Police Department indicated that ODS might have information that can aid in curtailing significant issues before/as they are forming. Not only could this aid the campus community, but it could also help the ODS brand as a contributing partner while allowing others to aid in ODS's indirect marketing.

### **Engaging Academic Affairs**

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*"The [separation of student affairs and academic affairs] ethos can be changed through dialogue because people have the opportunity to view the organization through different lenses,*

*evaluate their interpretation of the world, and identify new paths to achieving shared goals.”* (Arcelus, V.J., 2011)<sup>2</sup>.

In his chapter *If Student Affairs-Academic Affairs Collaborations Is Such a Good Idea, Why Are There So Few Examples of These Partnerships in American Higher Education?*, Arcelus (2011) identified several barriers to effective partnerships including a lack of understanding of the culture of each unit, a disconnect in the members perceptions of how they contribute to student learning, fragmented organizational structures, and weak institutional leadership. He also urged institutions to think beyond singular initiatives, which may yield short-term gains, and look towards engaging more in dialogue in an effort to discover common purpose and shared goals in an effort to “complement each other to provide students with a rich educational experience.”

Developing meaningful relationships with colleagues in academic affairs is instrumental to the work performed by the ODOS. In many ways, the DOS serves in a support role to faculty and staff in other units. Instead of just being a referral, faculty and staff seek out guidance from the DOS in helping them navigate student issues. Currently, the Dean of Student sits on the Provost Council and there appears to be a good number of faculty who rely on the AWARE Network and the staff in the ODS to assist them in student response matters. The current DOS has done a a good job visiting with several academic affairs units across campus which has gone a long way to build trust and increase communication.

### Challenges

- Academics want more ways to forward students who are in need; they are not trained to do so.
- Perceptions that Academic and Student Affairs are disconnected and there is not much of a way for them to communicate and be proactive.
- More interaction is needed from DOS to the Faculty Senate.
- International students may be at a disadvantage and may go to the international student office for assistance.

### Opportunities

- Position the DOS to be the primary link between student affairs and academic affairs

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<sup>2</sup> Arcelus, V. J. (2011). *If student affairs–academic affairs collaboration is such a good idea, why are there so few examples of these partnerships in American higher education. Contested issues in student affairs: Diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue*, 61-74.

Although many staff in the Division should be partnering regularly with academic affairs, it is recommended that the Dean of Students be responsible for continually bridging the gap, seeking new collaboration opportunities, and consistently code-switching to translate the messages of student affairs to academic affairs colleagues and vice versa. The DOS's title and level in the organization will align them with peer counterparts in academic affairs.

- Seek to get the DOS or ADOS on standing academic affairs councils/committees.

Currently, the DOS attends new faculty orientation and is a member of the Provost's Council. Being invited to sit as an invited member or ex-officio member on other committees such as the undergraduate and graduate deans committee, academic advisors committee, and/or faculty senate helps infuse knowledge around student issues and limit story creation in the absence of information. This person can also be a conduit of information back to the Division of Student Affairs on academic issues arising and seek collaboration opportunities for Student Affairs/ODS. Creating these types of ongoing opportunities for interaction serves to build trust and creates relationships that ensure a soft hand-off of students between academic affairs units and the ODS.

- Clarify policy and protocols for addressing issues of academic integrity.

Faculty members expressed some confusion related to the policies, reporting, structure, and practices related to academic integrity issues. It was relayed that a number of faculty are uncomfortable forwarding academic integrity issues to the Student Conduct Office due to how the office handled past incidents. New faculty members were discouraged by their peers to not report issues of academic integrity. There seems to be a negative narrative around the handling of these issues that should be addressed with an update on changes, information, and data. In addition, non-tenured faculty is reluctant to report/submit infractions when they are on temporary contracts and don't want to be perceived as "rocking the boat."

- Find ways to involve faculty when developing policy and practices. Consider developing a faculty advisory committee.

Involving faculty in the development or review of policy and practices out of the ODS may serve to build greater collaborations with academic affairs. Faculty insight can assist in identifying the unintended implications of policy/practices due to discipline specific nuances.

- Communicate policy changes broadly with faculty and academic affairs.

Faculty interviewed by the reviewers are curious about the status of the recent update to the student conduct code. The DOS can be instrumental in explaining the changes in a succinct manner that highlights how the changes may impact them and the work they do.

### **Engaging Student Affairs Staff on System Campuses**

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From the materials provided in advance, which was reinforced in a meeting with President Shulz, the reviewers gleaned that Washington State University “operates as an integrated university system, with all campuses adhering to the same set of practices and policies; degree requirements are similar across campuses; all instructors and researchers, regardless of location, are considered part of one faculty; and ***the offices of student affairs and finance and administration are regarded as distinct but highly integrated components of the same divisions.***”

In meeting with student affairs colleagues from the system’s campuses outside of Pullman, it was apparent that there is some need to continue to strengthen the relationship between all system members. The VPSA participates in regular meetings with her colleagues from the other campuses and should continue to do so as these meetings were perceived as valuable.

### Opportunities

- Involve system members when setting policy and developing processes.

The AVP/DOS should be intentional about involving and/or soliciting feedback from student affairs colleagues on other campuses when creating policy and/or protocols that will be applied system-wide. System members have felt in the past that the uniqueness of their campuses and student bodies were not taken into account when policies and protocols were being set on the Pullman campus.

- Clarify the expectations of the DOS/AVP as it relates to ODS issues on other campuses.

It would be beneficial for the new DOS/AVP to receive clear expectations of their involvement in DOS related issues on other campuses (i.e. conduct issues, concerning behavior, student death, student protests, etc.). Is there an expectation that they have

knowledge of high, threshold-crossing issues/incidents? If so, how should that information flow?

- Utilize system student affairs web meetings to develop strategy, communicate and/or solicit feedback.

Participants expressed a need to strengthen communication piece between campuses. Meetings and/or other working groups could help tackle issues such as, but not limited to, streamlining reporting practices and record keeping of CAR, BART, and CIRT among all system members and to discuss conduct transcript notations to capture behavior of students moving between system campuses.

- Create a more intentional plan on how to offer services and meeting the needs of Global Campus students.

The ODS receives funding for a part-time position to work with Global Campus students. The participants expressed that more attention needs to be shown to the Global Campus population, which is the second fastest growing population besides the Medical School. Understanding the needs of and how students in this population want to be engaged with the university beyond courses is essential.

### **Other Units Reporting the AVP/DOS**

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While the Office of the Dean of Students (ODS), due to recent restructuring, has three reporting units; Student Conduct, Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life, and Residence Life. These connections are important to note, because, as previously stated, many participants did not realize that all three of the previously mentioned departments reported to the ODS. Participants overwhelmingly understood the connection to student conduct but not the other two departments. The reviewers believe it essential address overall findings related to these three departments while also highlighting challenges and opportunities in support of the institution.

#### ***Student Conduct***

Review participants generally had positive remarks about the Student Conduct. During numerous points in the review, participants mentioned student conduct staff as a good group of professionals who are very knowledgeable in their work. Student Conduct was acknowledged as a team that is underappreciated by the campus community based on the nature of their

work and the lack of staff provided by the institution. While their competence was acknowledged, the consensus was that unfilled positions limited the effectiveness they could have otherwise. Similarly, as the level of expertise differed, a professional's experience more than likely determines the level of a case he/she can handle on behalf of the institution. Like many public institutions of similar size that use non-staff participants as Board members in discipline cases, Student Conduct is responsible for the training of Board members. Participants informed the reviewers that approximately 200 Board members are trained annually to serve in these integral conduct process roles. However, based on the number of available staff members, they are overwhelmed by the amount of time needed to train Board members while also hearing cases.

Additionally, with the necessary use of the Washington Administrative Procedure Act (APA) impacting student conduct cases, an increased amount of time is needed to understand the intricacies inherent in completing a successful process. Specific to Title IX cases, the reviewers were told (and have come to believe) that the APA and Student Conduct process may conflict with each other to the point that trained attorneys are needed. Further, as the APA changes are relatively recent, WSU is still figuring out many of the nuances.

### Challenges

While the previously mentioned are general observations of the Student Conduct department, there were specific challenges discovered in the various meetings. They are as follows:

- The relationship between the Director of Student Conduct and the Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity is perceived by many as a conflict of interest specific to Title IX cases. While this may not be a conflict in practice, staff reported that the Dean of Students (DOS) has to review cases, causing an increased use of time, to ensure that outcomes are supportable.
- Participants mentioned the perception of inequity. Participants stated that the student conduct process "demonizes" international students. When questioned, participants stated that international students comprise an increased number of academic dishonesty cases (i.e., cheating, collusion, and plagiarism).
- A generated case outcome through the student conduct process takes an exorbitant amount of time. Further, participants also stated that, unless there is "hard evidence" to support the complaint, it may be better not to complain due to fear that the process could be futile. While TA's and other graduate students understand the process to be fair, general perceptions persist in that responsibility may not be found.

- Specific to academic dishonesty cases, there was confusion among participants as to whether it was optional or mandatory to report potential infractions. This dissonance displays a lack of knowledge of the process.

### Opportunities

Participants also noted many opportunities as follows:

- As WSU has ways for students to gain an understanding of the University's standards and the student conduct process, additional ways for students to familiarize themselves are also needed. While orientation can aid in better understanding, students lack an opportunity to inform their peers. Professionals can disseminate information, but peer accountability and relationships may be more effective in some ways.
- The new handbook, due to be completed, in January can serve as a reintroduction to the University's standards.
- As international students seemingly come in contact with the student conduct process connected to academic integrity violations, an increased relationship with the international student office may allow avenues for additional education of international students before an allegation.
- The reexamination of personnel leading both the Student Conduct area and the Equal Opportunity can decrease the perceptions of a conflict of interest.

### ***Greek Life***

The Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life is an improving area. Much of the improvement is tied to the new energy brought forth by the director. His ability to relate to varying energies between the various councils and cultures of students within the councils, his ability prompt Greek organizations to review their impact on the greater community and his overall experience in the Greek Life area were noted numerous times. The authenticity and integrity of the Greek Life area seem to be laying a foundation for an overall stronger community. Greek Life is also an area that has visible surface diversity.

### Challenges

- While involved students expressed a connection to the Division of Student Affairs and professionals in the Division, students who are less involved mentioned feeling disconnected. Specifically, students perceived the Interfraternity Council as being powerful enough to disregard University standards through its affiliation with influential alumni. Other councils stated their desire to support the University's standards; if

unchecked, perceptions of inequity may increase to the detriment of the Greek Life community.

- While the University supports some Councils monetarily (the existence of these Councils is dependent on this support), the Councils believe that the support is coming solely from the Director and does not attribute support to the Division of Student Affairs or the University.
- The fraternity houses, connected to the IFC, are seen by underrepresented students as unsafe places. The culture connected to the houses are perceived to be understood by University leadership. Further, impacted students believe that University leadership ignores the impact of this culture on marginalized students. These perceptions are antithetical to the University's goal of increased diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Participants noted that complaints of sexual assault exist in the fraternity community at a heightened level. More attention is needed to understand this phenomenon specific to WSU better.

### Opportunities

Though challenges exist, the opportunities are as follows:

- Training and workshops focused on diversity, equity and inclusion can be offered to the overall Greek life community to foster dialogue among all organizations and councils. As such, perceptions can be addressed or challenged to increase understanding. The Greek Life director can be instrumental in facilitating these opportunities and can use the gained credibility to inspire trust among the essential groups.
- The Division of Student Affairs should further support the newer councils as an illustration of investment in the overall Greek community.

### ***Residence Life***

Student participants were the most vocal about strengths, challenges and opportunities in regards to the department of Residence Life. Student paraprofessionals serving as resident assistants and assistant hall director roles expressed excitement about their role working with students and representing the department. They felt well trained and prepared to serve in their roles and seemed very knowledgeable about the residence life and campus community.

### Challenges

- Participants mentioned housing contracts dates conflict with the orientation process. Having students on the campus with nothing to do or directions to channel their energies seem to provide an avenue for students to enter the conduct process prematurely. Until orientation programs begin, participants stated that students have no organized activities to devote their time.
- Students expressed first-generation and underrepresented students are given less desirable housing units based on a lack of familiarity with the housing process. If this is true, students may be situated in housing by socioeconomic status in a noticeable fashion.
- Similarly, students expressed that dining options reflect their socioeconomic status and cultural background by cuisine type. Specifically, students stated that food options for less affluent students are less healthy compared to other students who are more knowledgeable about the housing process and who live in the more desirable housing options.
- Students also stated a belief that housing infractions were approached in an inequitable fashion citing that students from historically underrepresented backgrounds feel profiled. Students cited a lack of connectivity with housing staff as well.

### Opportunities

- Residential life can work more closely with New Student Orientation to create community-building options for new students and students who report to the campus before the start of classes. Such options could familiarize students with the campus in healthier ways that students cannot do on their own.
- Increased education on the Residential Life's housing assignment process may either address students' perceptions of inequity or help the institution's current practices if fundamentally flawed.
- Dining services, as connected to Residence Life, can survey students' perceptions of food choices to either address students' perceptions of inequity or help the institution's current practices if fundamentally flawed.
- Training and workshops focused on diversity, equity and inclusion can be offered to Housing personnel and residents to examine perceptions in the community while

### **Concluding Comments**

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The Review Team is impressed with the dedication the Division and the Office of the Dean of Students to student success. The office has gone through a variety of leadership and structural changes, yet have managed to continue running impactful services. The current search should

yield new leadership which will provide some stability in the office and allow time, using these recommendations as discussion starters, to think strategically and act intentionally on creating and enhancing process and services for the WSU students. Once again, we extend our thanks to all involved and commend the Division and the Office of the Dean of Students for their outstanding service to Washington State's students, faculty, staff and the external community.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **External Review Interview Participants**

- Office of Dean of Students staff
- ASWSU- Associated Students of Washington State University
- GPSA- Graduate and Professional Student Association
- Student Affairs cabinet members
- BART - Bias Assessment and Response Team members
- CARE Team members
- Student Affairs Directors
- Crisis Response Stakeholders
- Academic Integrity Hearing Board & Appeals Board members
- Faculty Senate leadership and additional invitees
- Campus Stakeholders
- Vice Presidents and Invitees

**APPENDIX B****Partial List of Protocol/Policies to be written/updated for Dean of Students Office**

Interview participants mentioned the following protocols/policies to be addressed first:

- Student Affairs Emergency Duty
- Emergency Management/CIRT
- Student Death Protocol
  - Condolence Protocol
  - Memorial Places on Campus
- Missing Student Policy/Protocol
- Administrative Cancellation of Enrollment
- Student Care Team
  - AWARE Network
  - Injury Reports (students) from HRS

The following were not mentioned by participants but identified by the ODS.

- Lighty Building Policies
  - Lighty Atrium after-hours reservation
  - Lighty Building Coordinator
  - Lighty Safety Committee
- Conduct
  - Maxient Data
  - OEO Relationship
  - Student Behavior Off-campus
- Residence Life
  - Sex offenders on campus/ in residence halls
  - University Approved Housing (UAH)
  - Freshman Live-In Appeals (FLIR)
- Student Assistance
  - Student assistance appointments
  - Courtesy Notices
- Clergy Project
- Dean's Certification
- Emergency loans
- Home Town Emergencies
- Notary
- Complaints
- E-mail inquiries
- Parent calls and general complaints