

## **Community of Belonging Task Force Report**

Creating a community of belonging requires meaningful opportunities for community members to interact, so that community members can communicate about how they interpret the mission, vision, and values of the college; how they prioritize them; and how they collaborate with others to make best use of available resources. The Building a Community of Belonging Task Force has examined how our community can become more equitable and inclusive, wrestling with the need to balance key aspects of Carleton culture with the need to ensure a rewarding and generative work culture and the need to see that every student receives the necessary support to succeed. We offer the following recommendations toward building a stronger community of belonging.

### **PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Campus Community Connections:**

As the campus community has become increasingly diverse, the need for opportunities to interact across professional, academic, and social divisions has also increased. COVID amplified this need with increases in lock-downs and the resulting social isolation, working from home, and staff turnover. The college should address the need for more interaction by creating a variety of programs to bring faculty, staff, and students together in professional, academic, and social settings and to encourage ongoing connections and collaboration.

We recommend that the college achieve these goals by

- providing all employees with an annual allotment of hours to be used to engage with academic, professional, and community-building programming on campus
- reinstating the winter term convocation dialogue groups to encourage small groups of faculty, staff, and students to discuss convocation together
- reestablishing annual social events for all employees and their families (both in Northfield and the Twin Cities)
- expanding offerings of winter and/or spring break trips led by faculty and staff
- providing incentives for academic collaborations, including but not limited to
  - cross-department and cross-division collaboration to fund academic speakers and events, and scheduling them to increase the number of on-campus events that have broad appeal
  - interdisciplinary and team teaching
  - integrating academic staff into course development and implementation.

- providing opportunities to recognize and publicly share the professional work of faculty, staff, and students across divisions and departments

**Goals/Outcome: Reinforce our commitment to creating a community of belonging that requires meaningful opportunities for community members to interact.**

**First-Generation Student Success Office:**

The college should create a First-Generation Student Success Office to provide programming and support for all first-generation students in the Carleton community. Building upon the successes of TRIO (federally funded), Posse, QuestBridge, FOCUS, CUBE, and Carleton's identity as a First-Gen Forward Institution, we advise the college to fund an office dedicated fully to the work of supporting first-generation college students. Carleton's first-generation student population is currently approximately 15% and growing. We need to ensure that first-gen students are able to access the kinds of support that grant-funded programs have historically allowed for a select group of students at Carleton. Creating a specific office for first-gen students would help them to build connections with their peers while increasing their self-confidence, connect them with college resources, educate the community on the diversity within the first-gen population, destigmatize the first-gen identity, and provide opportunities for collaboration among offices that already support first-generation students, such as TRIO, International Student Life, Office of Intercultural Life, etc.

To accomplish these important and ambitious goals, the First-Gen Office should have sufficient resources to provide

- peer mentors for first-year students to aid their adjustment to Carleton
- educational programming that aids students in acquiring skills that will help in both college and beyond Carleton
- social events that develop strong connections among first-gen students
- aid for students with financial and academic needs, e.g., supplemental academic advising
- an annual gathering of first-generation faculty, staff, and students

**Goals/Outcome: Reinforce our commitment to recruiting, retaining, and graduating a diverse student body.**

**Substantial Endowment for Emergency Funding:**

The need for student emergency funding has grown as the economy continues to fluctuate and Carleton's demographics diversify. Many students are unable to gather resources in times of serious need. This fund is intended to be a supplemental financial resource when students are unable to meet immediate and essential expenses because of a temporary hardship, such as an

accident, illness, death of a family member, fire damage, or a need for temporary. Currently, the dean of student's office receives almost daily requests for emergency funding and this will assist in meeting those needs.

**Goals/Outcome: Reinforce our commitment to meeting the needs of a diverse student body.**

**Student Mental Health Working Group:**

The demand for mental health services, along with parental expectations for care, have increased tremendously in the last couple of decades. Discussions about student health and wellness illustrate the challenges colleges and universities are facing nationally. The COVID-19 pandemic only increased the prevalence of and awareness of students' mental health challenges. Current approaches to providing mental healthcare need to be reimaged to enable the college to meet students' needs in more sustainable ways.

We now have an opportunity to examine the Carleton community's current needs and explore holistic approaches to student mental health and wellness. The purpose of the Student Mental Health Working Group is to develop strategies for service and care that contribute to the well-being of Carleton. The planned development of a new facility for Student Health and Counseling Services (SHAC) in 2025, along with effective programming, will contribute to these efforts.

Short-term recommendations include, but are not limited to

- offering an unlimited telehealth option for all students
- hiring an additional case manager to assist in providing support and care for students

Long-term recommendations include, but are not limited to

- offering courses within the PE requirement to include courses on healthy eating and nutrition, sleep, stress management, and other mental health and wellness topics
- reviewing and approving appropriate recommendations from the Student Mental Health and Wellness working group

**Goals/Outcome: Reinforce our commitment to creating a community of belonging that requires meaningful opportunities for community members to interact.**

**Prioritize Athletics and Recreation in Future Facility Planning:**

The Physical Education, Athletics, and Recreation (PEAR) department is a focus for student engagement with their health and wellbeing. Students are increasingly prioritizing their physical and mental health, making our facilities instrumental in promoting lifelong healthy habits.

PEAR facilities fall short of meeting the needs and expectations of our students for several reasons, all centering around safety, equity, and accessibility.

PEAR strives to address many of the health and wellness needs of the campus community. The PE graduation requirement requires 100% of the student body to use athletic and recreation spaces and resources, while 74% of the student body participates in intramurals, sport clubs, or varsity athletics. The number of faculty and staff users of recreation classes and wellness programs continues to grow steadily. To fully realize the goals of the 2014 Facilities Master Plan, the college should continue to support the plan to relocate programs and competitive events currently held in the West Gym. The support and relocation include an addition to the Recreation Center, comprising

- a new natatorium and gymnasium
- an all-season structure with a turf field and an indoor tennis facility
- upgrades to existing buildings (e.g., Recreation Center locker rooms, athletic training rooms, and storage)
- upgrades to existing field spaces (e.g., relocation of men's soccer practice field) and Recreation fields (for sport clubs and intramurals)

We believe that implementing our working group's recommendations will

- eliminate current safety, accessibility, and equity concerns
- eliminate travel and rental costs, not to mention the time needed for travel, that club and varsity teams must assume because we lack adequate teaching spaces for practices and competitions
- enhance learning opportunities through flexible and shared teaching and learning with a design that provides adaptive, creative, comfortable, multipurpose, active learning spaces
- augment the PE curriculum to include life skills, mindfulness, nutrition, mental health first aid, and support for lifelong learning that enhances all dimensions of wellness

**Goals/Outcomes: To expand the learning and teaching of PEAR to support and strengthen the holistic well-being of the entire campus community. Ensure PEAR facilities are instrumental in promoting lifelong healthy habits for faculty, staff, and students.**

**Leadership, Management, and Professional Development Support:**

Community members need to feel supported in their current professional roles so they can develop the knowledge and skills for their continued growth. Without such support, not only do employees (student workers, staff, and faculty) work less efficiently, but they are less proactive, more prone to burnout, and more likely to seek opportunities outside of Carleton.

Managers—including student employment supervisors, department managers, department chairs, and program directors--play a key role in fostering employees' development.

We recommend expanding interrelated professional development programs for employees that provide

- regular, mandatory managerial training for all supervisors (see list above) to promote equitable and consistent employment practices, ensure knowledge of Carleton's employment policies and best practices for employee development, and develop effective leadership skills among supervisors
- mechanisms for continuous assessment and improvement of managerial skills (e.g., 360 reviews)
- cohort-based professional development and leadership programs
- professional and leadership skills gained from student work experiences (as detailed in the Student Employment Working Group Recommendations)
- identification of potential career paths and advancement opportunities at Carleton for current employees and provide support for pursuing them
- support to employees who wish to pursue relevant academic degrees or professional credentials

**Goals/Outcomes: To amplify Carleton's reputation as an employer of choice.**

## **SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2024 Facilities Master Plan:**

Since the development of the 2014 Facilities Master Plan, the college has made significant infrastructure investments. As we move toward a 2024 Facilities Master Plan, we recommend that the college make focused investments in facilities that directly advance the academic mission of the college and promote authentic belonging and community for all its members. This investment should reallocate spaces and uses within certain buildings, construct new buildings, and judiciously add to existing buildings. Specific recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- investing in faculty housing as outlined in the recent March 2023 Faculty and Staff Housing Report prepared by the Faculty Affairs Committee
- reimagining the Sayles Hill Campus Center
- relocating staff in the 200 Division Street building to an on-campus location

**Goals/Outcomes: To ensure that campus facilities contribute to the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff. To enhance the Campus Center so that it can serve as a better hub for student activity.**

**Employee Wellness Team:**

The college should appoint an employee wellness team as part of the college governance structure. This group, which would provide guidance on systems related to employee well-being, should include representatives from every division and a President's Cabinet sponsor. This team will examine issues related to the college's oft-noted "culture of busyness" and related burnout of faculty and staff, and make three to five recommendations for improving employee well-being. Their recommendations should look beyond strategies for individual wellness and instead focus on systemic recommendations that address reported challenges within the college's systems. Their recommendations may

- find ways to "sunset" programs/initiatives that are no longer priorities
- address areas of unmanageable workloads
- examine challenges related to understaffing or lack of capacity, especially during periods of staff transition/turnover
- address barriers to professional development and promotion within the college
- educate managers on ways to support staff with professional development opportunities, vacation time, and opportunities for building community connections

**Goals/Outcomes: To amplify Carleton's reputation as an employer of choice.**

**All-Staff Advisory Council:**

We recommend that the college create an inclusive All-Staff Advisory Council with representatives from each staff group (exempt, non-exempt, union, auxiliary services) to foster collaboration, bolster communication and information sharing, and strengthen the sense of belonging to a community. This council would look at ways to reduce and/or eliminate barriers between roles within the Carleton community, while recognizing that there are some benefits to meeting in smaller groups, which could be accomplished through subcommittees within all-staff Advisory Council. This council would also

- incorporate the current Staff at Carleton (biweekly staff) and Forum (exempt staff) organizations into a new council with representatives from all staff groups
- explore models for creating sub-committees within the Council to address staff group-specific concerns, as needed
- identify opportunities to partner with the Faculty Affairs Committee to bring staff and faculty together for social connections, educational opportunities, and meaningful interactions

**Goals/Outcomes: To enhance community connections among all staff employees. To amplify Carleton's reputation as an employer of choice.**

**Employee Retention:**

To increase retention of staff and faculty, the college should

- re-evaluate employee and student-worker compensation and benefits
- Create on-campus student internship opportunities
- Create staff sabbatical opportunities and/or introduce a cross-departmental training program
- consider options for remote work parity across different offices and divisions while recognizing that not all jobs have the same needs
- review and promote potential career paths and advancement opportunities at Carleton for current employees and provide support for pursuing them

**Goals/Outcomes: To amplify Carleton's reputation as an employer of choice to ensure students maximize on campus student employment.**

**Reimagine the College's Diversity Statement:**

The college's current diversity statement was last approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2007. Since then, the college has increased its demographic diversity, which has contributed to the rich experiences of students, faculty and staff. Carleton believes that diversity in its many dimensions enhances our academic and residential life and enriches our understanding of the world. We do some of our most rigorous thinking when we interact with people whose perspectives differ from our own. For these reasons, we recommend that the college regularly revisit, and, if necessary, revise its diversity statement so it aligns with the community's values.

**Goals/Outcomes: To reinforce our commitment to diversity and inclusion and align our statements with our values.**