

Strategic Plan Proposal
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Wellness Coordinator

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Connections to Strategic Planning: This proposal, to create the position of Wellness Coordinator, is consistent with the intent of the Smith College strategic plan initiative. Re-imagining a Liberal Arts Education speaks to the need for Smith, as a residential college, to develop programs through residence life that help build *essential student capacities*. Wellness, being of sound body and mind, is certainly an essential student capacity. Students need to be well to learn optimally and yet, many do not have the essential skills of wellness. The strategic plan speaks to the *purposeful engagement with society's challenges*. Wellness is a major challenge in our society with obesity being epidemic, alcohol abuse resulting in significant morbidity and mortality and stress being an ever increasing reality of the 21st century. *Preparing women for rewarding lives in a rapidly changing world* requires that they learn to live well. The strategic plan speaks to the need for *active engagement with social, political, aesthetic and scientific issues on all levels*. Discussion of wellness today by necessity must include exploration of all these issues, making it an ideal bridge between the academic and residential sides of the campus.

Background: There are several independent components that have led to this proposal. Smith College has been without a Health Educator since May 2004 leading to concern over potential consequences of not having a primary alcohol prevention program in place. In the spring of 2006, an ad hoc committee met four times to discuss the need for a wellness initiative focusing on: nutrition, exercise and obesity. Offices represented included: Health Service, Counseling Service, Dining Services, Athletics Department, Residential Life and students. It was agreed that obesity, poor nutrition and lack of exercise were significant issues on the campus and would be best addressed broadly. Finally, the Office of Student Affairs was becoming increasingly concerned with the fragmented and limited nature of wellness programming available with many student needs being unmet and identified the need for a wellness coordinator.

Proposal: Three significant health issues challenge Smith students with obstacles to success both as students and future leaders. Alcohol abuse, obesity/poor nutrition/lack of exercise and stress pose serious risks to the wellbeing of our community and yet lend themselves to successful intervention through a community based wellness approach.

Dr. Henry Wechsler, of the Harvard School of Public Health, has identified alcohol abuse as the number one public health issue on college campuses today. Because consequences of alcohol misuse are less visible on a women's campus, such as the absence of parties disrupting the wider community (as seen at UMASS) it is easy/convenient to ignore the impact at Smith. Yet, the recent CORE Institute survey of alcohol use (March 2006) demonstrates we have a very serious problem: 38% of our students engage in binge drinking, the type of drinking associated with sexual assault and impaired academic performance. In the same survey, most students said, correctly, that Smith College does not have an alcohol prevention program. This data is particularly troublesome given that just two years ago, the same survey indicated a binge drinking rate of 20%.

Arguably, the most significant public health issue confronting our society is obesity. It has been estimated that one third of all babies born in 2000 will eventually develop diabetes because of obesity. Smith is not immune from this epidemic with many students struggling with unhealthy weight gain. Obesity is a women's health issue, ranging from the impact it has on body image and menstrual cycles today to premature morbidity and death in the future. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women and it will only become worse. While many resources have been expended on helping students with traditional eating disorders, including bulimia and anorexia, little has been done at Smith either to prevent

obesity or support obese students wanting to lose weight. As important for cardiovascular health is proper nutrition and exercise. Yet, many students do not eat well or exercise.

The third health issue, stress, is integral to the other two. Student culture is defined as one of stress; it is fashionable for students to describe themselves as 'stressed out'. At times, there seems to be a competitive edge to being the most stressed. If one is not stressed, then you are not a 'real Smithie.' Of course, stress is a natural and normal part of life. Yet, there are positive and harmful ways of dealing with it. For example, learning to incorporate exercise into daily routine is a healthy way to cope with stress. Many students, however, deal with stress by drinking ('study hard, play hard') or overeating, using food as a way to relax and treat their stressed feelings. First year students are 'inoculated' early, in the first 6 weeks, into the campus culture of stress and alcohol. Knowing this provides us with an opportunity to intervene.

In the recently published book Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter, (2005) George Kuh, Jillian Kinzie, John Schuh, Elizabeth Whitt and associates state that one of the keys to fostering student success in college is to "front load resources to smooth the transition". Reflected in their work is the fact that "newcomers need considerable structure and support to establish themselves academically and socially and to learn how to take advantage of the institution's resources for learning" (p. 314). They concluded that concentrating major efforts on the first two years of a student's college experience provided a solid base of knowledge that students carried with them.

We propose to establish a Wellness Coordinator position at Smith. This position will allow us to program activities and educational events to support wellness and health education efforts with particular emphasis on outreach to new students. As suggested in the research above, if students are presented with this information on health and leading a balanced life consistently in the first two years, they are more likely to utilize the information and practice the behaviors during their remaining years at Smith and beyond.

The Wellness coordinator would provide programming as well as direct and support the outreach work done by offices within the student affairs unit and other offices on campus in the area of wellness, health and balance. The Wellness Coordinator would support those who are working to bring Smith's health education and wellness efforts to the standards of a college of this caliber.

We propose that this position will entail the following responsibilities:

1. Programming on issues related to alcohol awareness, healthy nutrition, exercise and stress management
2. Normalizing wellness as an integral component of the campus culture, e.g ensuring that exercise, nutrition and alcohol awareness become part of all orientation programming for first year students.
3. Support the strategic planning goal of interweaving the curriculum and co curriculum to enhance each other's efforts. Many academic departments offer courses relevant to current health issues. These departments could work together to support the wellness program in several ways. Infusing the curriculum with didactic content appropriate to the discipline. For example, an economics professor might include readings and discussion on the future earnings impact of alcoholism. Academic departments could work collaboratively to sponsor a lecture series of outside speakers addressing these issues comprehensively. Biology, women's studies, African-American studies, film studies, and economics all have a stake in the obesity epidemic, ranging from the physiology and medical consequences of obesity, to media representation of women, the economic consequences of obesity in our society, to the particular issues for women of color, particularly within the African-American community.

By researching the starting salary for this type of position in the local area, it is estimated that a salary of \$32,000 per year, plus \$9,600 in benefits (total compensation of \$41,600), is appropriate for a professional with a master's degree at the entry level, or a bachelor's level professional with experience. An additional \$7,500 will be need for supporting materials and supplies. Total cost of the position: \$49,100.