

Strategic Planning Initiative:

Preparing Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly Changing World:

Preparing students for the world of work through campus-based leadership and work opportunities

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The opportunities for Smith students to work and build professional and leadership skills at the college are seemingly endless. From a first-year working in dining services to a senior serving as president of the SGA, students are engaged in potentially meaningful experiences that can instill valuable life-long skills and habits. We propose that Smith create and implement more formalized training standards and support opportunities for students, as well as supervisors, designed to cultivate skills that can transfer to the world of work. Successful work experience can assist with recruitment, retention and graduation of academically proficient and talented women. Further, we propose that the college consider creating a leveled rewards structure to compensate and encourage students for taking on greater levels of responsibility and for performing well in their roles. Many departments have acknowledged that students are critical partners in providing delivery of a wide variety of services to campus clientele. Many students develop and or possess skills, work experience, extremely specialized experience or training which makes them invaluable assets to the campus community.

Training and Support

Student training and support is largely contingent upon the office and supervisor at the college. Some offices spend a great deal of time and energy developing training materials, training sessions, conduct codes, and other support mechanisms, while others are much less formal. We propose that a short-term campus-wide committee be put in place to look at various training materials, and make recommendations for a college-wide set of suggested guidelines for training and supporting student workers. Further, we recommend that the college offer workshops for employees supervising student workers designed to foster enhanced supervision and support of student skill development.

Rewards System

Student worker responsibilities range greatly, a factor that can often be the result of overall preparation and experience. We propose that the college examine and implement a vehicle for progressive and increased compensation based on the demands of the role, their longevity in the position, and increased levels of responsibility over time. A campus-wide committee should explore this further, examining not only the compensation structure at Smith, but other institutions as well, for models. In addition to compensation, there may be other reward systems that would create incentives for students. This committee should also examine the benefits of a formalized evaluation process that could not only be connected to a leveled rewards program but would leave a record of performance that may be beneficial to future career or job opportunities.

Exploration of Electronic Portfolios

Affording students the opportunity to critically reflect upon and assimilate the range of experiences acquired in college can enable them to build valuable connections to the future. Too often, students beg questions such as, "How does my work in this organization have anything to do with getting a job when I graduate?" This is one example of a student compartmentalizing her experience rather than seeing it as a valuable step that can and should be integrated into an informed plan for the future.

Electronic portfolios have been used on college campuses as vehicles for reflection, and for understanding the progression of one's work and experience. Wesleyan University, for example, uses electronic portfolios to encourage students to explore the following areas:

- Academic Goals
- My Courses of Interest
- Future Plans and Aspirations
- Resume development
- Samples of work
- Skills, Interests and Resume

As part of this proposal, or as a separate enterprise, I recommend that a committee explore options for a vehicle of reflective exploration similar to the one used at Wesleyan. The goals should be to enable students to build the connections between their work on campus, leadership experiences, internships, academic studies, study abroad, and their future goals and endeavors.