



## Part I: Follow-up Assessment Report Template

**Date of Follow-up Report Submission: May 8, 2020**

**Name of Department / Unit: Center for Students with Disabilities/Student Affairs**

**Name of Contact Person: Gregory Moorehead, Ed.D.**

**Name of Person(s) Completing Follow-up Report: Gregory Moorehead, Ed.D.**

### I. Follow-Up on Last Year's Assessment Report Recommendations

- *Recommendation #1: Additional student support and supervision may be necessary to help assist student leaders who are navigating complex student situations which may exceed their level of training.*

Specific Actions: DePaul Student Affairs: Graduate Assistant New Staff Orientation—the CSD was certain that our Graduate Interns (GIs) attended this session so that they were knowledgeable of the division's mission and our philosophy for student support.

GIs also attended a workshop offered by the Office of Student Employment: *Using Myers Briggs Type Indicator to Enhance your Student Employment Training*. In this workshop, students self-assessed four different preferences to discover their MBTI personality type. With each assessment, they discussed how they could utilize their preferences as strengths as well as effectively collaborate with their manager and coworkers.

The GIs also attended a Webinar through Workforce Recruitment Program: *Supporting College Students with Mental Health Conditions in the Wake of COVID-19*. Because the pandemic and the switch to online learning presents particular challenges to students with disabilities, this workshop was critical for our GIs who remain on the front lines (maintaining virtual office hours) to assist and direct students in relation to a host of concerns.

Results: While there are no quantitative results to report the GIS have acquired more knowledge and have identified and enhanced skill sets that better equip them for responding to and managing complex concerns presented by students.

- *Recommendation #2: While it may not be possible to have a clear pathway for every crisis situation, student leaders want access to ongoing training, including the ability to debrief, consult and receive supervision from their professional staff members.*

Specific Actions: Weekly Meetings with Supervisors---The GIs meet weekly with their supervisors to review assignments, discuss progress, and develop strategies for addressing and resolving any difficulties they have encountered.

Results: While there are no quantitative results to report, our Graduate Interns have developed a virtual office where they greet students (as well as other guests); answer their questions; and help them address concerns, and/or refer them to other CSD staff.

- *Recommendation #3: Student leaders are highly responsible but may need coaching as to when to consult and refer to professional staff members.*

Specific Actions: GIs are located in CSD offices on both campuses in the reception areas along with the Administrative Assistants.

Results: The office configuration and the work stations for GIs greatly reduce the instances in which GIs would need to manage complex situations without immediate access to and support from a full-time staff member who can coach them through a concern. Because of this configuration GIs can also easily observe full-time staff managing complex student concerns.



## **Part II: Annual Assessment Report Template: Learning**

Academic Year: 2019-2020

**Date of Report Submission: November 2, 2020**

**Name of Department / Unit: Center for Students with Disabilities/Student Affairs**

**Name of Contact Person: Lavonne Kopca**

**Name of Person(s) completing report or contributing to the project: Lavonne Kopca**

### **I. Abstract**

The social and academic benefits for college students in having a sense of belonging within their institution have been well documented. However, these benefits often escape students with disabilities. The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) provides two programs for students that include components to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion within the University. The CSD implemented a learning assessment to determine the extent to which student participants were able to describe the benefits of belonging to a supportive social community. A survey was internally designed with a reflection prompt to collect data at the end of the 2020 spring term. Findings indicate that a slight majority of participants met the learning outcome; however, this was lower than expected. Next steps include revising the program design to improve participant's experiences and mastery of this learning outcome.

### **II. Assessment Question**

To what extent are students who participate in the CSD School Success Group (SSG) and Delta Alpha Pi (DAPi) International Honor Society able to describe the benefits of belonging to a supportive social community?

### **III. Introduction & Context**

#### **Project Overview**

The Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) provides accommodations and services designed to create equal access to University facilities, programs, and activities. However, the CSD mission also focuses on supporting students' development of self-advocacy and independence in order to achieve their academic and personal goals. When students' experience a sense of belonging and inclusion within their postsecondary institution they often experience increased academic success.

### **Learning Outcomes Assessed**

The learning outcome that the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) aimed to assess this year fell under a program area that focuses on students' level of engagement and social integration with the University. This program area is to *Foster a Sense of Belonging*. A strong sense of belonging in college students is known to enhance academic performance which is the main goal of the CSD. There are two key activities provided by the CSD that relate to this program area. First, is the School Success Group (SSG) for students whose disability includes challenges with social communication. The second activity is the Delta Alpha Pi (DAPI) Honor Society for students who identify as a student with a disability and meet credit hour and GPA requirements for membership.

- The primary learning outcome the CSD assessed this year was:
  - Students who participate in activities and services designed to foster a sense of belonging will be able to describe the benefits of belonging to supportive social communities.

### **Context for This Year's Report**

Higher education disability service departments, including the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD), exist to ensure equal access for students with disabilities to allow for their full participation in educational and co-curricular programs and activities available at the University based upon legal mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended (2008) and Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. While higher education institutions are required to meet only a compliance level of access and non-discrimination, the CSD seeks to provide more holistic programming and support services to promote academic success which we define broadly as persistence to graduation. This includes activities and services to develop students' independence, self-advocacy, communication, and help-seeking behaviors as well as a sense of belonging and affinity with the University learning community.

Two programs that are directed towards the holistic development of CSD students are the School Success Group (SSG) and the Delta Alpha Pi (DAPI) Honor Society. These two programs are equally intended to foster a sense of belonging for students with disabilities. However, they are also designed to meet the needs of members in each group. The primary goal of the School Success Group is to provide a venue where current students, who have been diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum, can interact with and learn from each other. The curriculum is purposely fluid and attempts to address the needs and concerns of the group members. The topics address may include social skills/interaction; communication strategies with peers, professors, employers; executive functioning with a focus on organization and time-management skills; and career readiness such as work related skills, life skills, self-care, stress management and relaxation techniques.

The Delta Alpha Pi (DAPI) Honor Society is an international honor society with 168 chapters in colleges and universities across the country. DAPI celebrates academically successful students with disabilities and seeks to eliminate negative attitudes often associated with disability. Another purpose of DAPI is to develop leadership and advocacy skills in its members. The CSD has organized the DePaul University chapter of

DAPI (Zeta Delta) with the goal of engaging students with disabilities to take action to raise awareness of the accomplishments of students with disabilities and create opportunities to dialog with various University stakeholders to view disability as a natural variation of diversity and promote Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in academic programs and cocurricular programming.

The goals of the School Success Group and Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society dovetail with two learning domains outlined by the Division of Student Affairs: Academic Success and Commitment to Community. The School Success Group and DAPI both foster knowledge and skills that “contribute to a successful educational experience” and are “necessary for living and working in a pluralistic society”. The University learning goals and outcomes aligned with this assessment project include intellectual and creative skills; personal and social responsibilities; and intercultural and global understanding.

It has been 30 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was enacted. Since the groundbreaking legislation was introduced the number of college students with disabilities has increased significantly and students with disabilities constitute a substantial percent of all college students (Ali, 2020). Still, Ali (2020) finds that a large portion of current students with disabilities feel there is not full and equitable access for college students with disabilities. Ali (2020) reported that dozens of interviews with college students with disabilities reveal that students “have faced significant difficulty with accessibility and accommodation beyond just physical barriers, and that this has affected their sense of belonging on campus”. This reporting indicates that despite compliance with legal mandates for equal access, college students with disabilities are still facing attitudinal barriers that negatively impact their success and persistence. While disability service offices are responsible for compliance in accommodating college students with disabilities, “this narrow requirement can limit higher education institutions to merely emphasize accommodations as opposed to proactive initiatives that can promote development of belonging” (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015, p. 683). Vaccaro et al. (2015) recommend disability service professionals collaborate with other functional areas in the creation of campus wide policies that promote a sense of belonging and self-advocacy for students with disabilities.

Attitudinal barriers faced by college students with disabilities from peers and faculty play a role in diminishing a student’s sense of belonging in the institution. Goslan and Rudick (2016) note “that a negative sense of belonging (e.g. not fitting in or feelings of rejection and invisibility) within and by the university was a major contributing factor to the high attrition rate of students with disabilities” (p. 103). Other researchers have found “that if new students do not start to feel like they ‘belong’ within eight weeks of arriving on campus they are at especially high risk for dropping out” (Leake & Stodden, 2014, p. 403). A truly inclusive and accessible campus environment portrays a sense that all are welcome here (Vaccaro et al., 2015). When examining experiences of traditionally underrepresented college students, Aquino, Alhaddab, and Kim (2017) found that a sense of belonging was lower for students with disabilities than their non-disabled peers. Additionally, Aquino et al. (2017) found that minority students with disabilities perceived campus diversity efforts lower than their non-disabled, underrepresented peers. This

highlights “the significant role disability plays in influencing student attitudes toward and views of diversity on campus” (Aquino et al., p. 58, 2017). These key findings strongly position the CSD School Success Group and DAPi Honor Society to impact the sense of belonging for students who participate.

#### **IV. Data Collection & Methodology**

##### **Population and Sample**

Among the broader community of 849 students with disabilities enrolled in the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) to receive reasonable accommodations during the winter 2020 term, the population for this assessment included 35 students in total with 6 students from the School Success Group and 29 students from the Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society. This population was selected because of the learning expectations associated with these two activities. A census sample was used where all members of these groups were invited to participate in this project. This sampling decision is appropriate for this assessment as the CSD assessment question is “To what extent are students who participate in the CSD School Success Group (SSG) and Delta Alpha Pi (DAPi) International Honor Society able to describe the benefits of belonging to a supportive social community”? The CSD is specifically seeking information about the learning of participants in these groups and not focused on generalizing the findings to the broader CSD population.

##### **Data Collection**

To collect data from our sample the CSD used a Qualtrics survey (*See Appendix A & B*). The survey utilized a reflection prompt specific to either the School Success Group or the Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society Group to elicit evidence of student learning. The survey also included two additional questions to measure students’ perceptions of their experiences. These Likert Scale questions were intended to assess the likelihood the student would recommend the group to other students. The additional question was a satisfaction rating scale to determine satisfaction with components of the group such as facilitator preparation and feeling welcome in the group. The survey was created by this writer with assistance from D. Scott Tharp, Student Affairs Assessment & Effectiveness Specialist. The survey was not integrated into the existing activities of either the SSG or DAPi groups. The survey link was emailed to students and open for students to complete over a three-week time span. The first email was sent to group participants on May 12, 2020. Reminder emails went out on May 19<sup>th</sup> and May 27<sup>th</sup> which included the last day the survey would be available which was June 1, 2020. Additionally, the weekly facilitators for the SSG provided reminders for students to respond to the survey. As all students in the sample have a disability(s), the survey offered an alternative format of an in-person or phone interview in the event the disability presented a barrier to completion of the survey. No participants in the sample population requested an alternative format to complete the survey.

##### **Data Analysis**

A qualitative method of analysis was used for this assessment project. A Sense of Belonging rubric was created by this writer to classify the extent to which participants in

the School Success Group (SSG) and the Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society (DAPI) were able to describe the benefits of belonging to a supportive social community (*See Appendix C*). The rubric was created based on the requirements of the prompt itself and the depth and language of the prompt. The depth and language of the prompt criteria was guided by findings from Kimball, Friedensen, and Silva (2017) examining the role of disability in engaging college students with disabilities. Kimball et al. (2017) identified four main areas of engagement that students with disabilities feel are most important; experiences of their disability in the classroom, access to a variety of support at the institution; supportive peer networks; and the relevancy of disability identity. Language used by participants in their study was incorporated into the Sense of Belonging rubric which was scored by this writer. The rubric consisted of a total of 3 domains (i.e., depth & language of reflection; personal benefit examples; other/university benefit examples) each with three scale points (i.e., below expectations worth 0 points; meets expectations worth 1 point; exceeds expectations worth 2 points). A student could receive a total score between 0 and 6 points. Students scoring 3 or better are considered to have an acceptable or better performance on the assessed learning outcome. The threshold of a score of 3 to be considered acceptable or better performance reflects a holistic view of the student. This assessment project did not control for variables such as age, gender, race, academic standing or status, multiple disabilities, etc. It is an assumption that every participant is able to achieve at the same academic level. This assessment project is examining the totality of the rubric domains and not simply that a participant met expectations in all three domains to demonstrate learning. Descriptive data of the rating scale questions was used to support or provide additional context to participants' responses to the reflection prompt.

### **Participant Consent**

The CSD incorporated informed consent through the survey administered to participants (*See Appendix A & B*). The language that introduced the survey specifically mentioned their participation was voluntary and required they agree or not agree to participate. Furthermore, it informed students they could end the survey at any time with no penalty for not completing the survey. Participants were informed that their CSD enrollment and associated accommodations as well as their membership in either group would not be affected by their decision to participate or not participate. Participants information was kept secure in the Qualtrics system which requires secure login access. Only participant responses were exported for analysis and not any identifiable participant information. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not necessary for this assessment, as it will not be used for distribution or publication purposes.

## **V. Data & Findings**

### **Response Rate and Demographics**

In total, 14 students participated in this project yielding a 40% response rate. This included five students from School Success Group and nine students who completed the Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society. This is a relatively low response rate, but the goal of the assessment project is not intended to generalize findings to the entire CSD population. Rather, our goal is to assess the extent to which students who participate in SSG and

DAPI have met our learning outcome of fostering a sense of belonging. No other demographic information was collected such as year in school, gender, etc.

### **Key Findings**

The key findings of this assessment project is that only a little over half of the participants were able to demonstrate acceptable or better performance in describing the benefits of belonging to a support social group. Two of the five students in the School Success Group (SSG) displayed acceptable or better performance in their response to the reflection prompt. Six of the nine students in the Delta Alpha Honor Society (DAPI) group scored in the acceptable or better performance in their response to the reflection prompt. In total, 57% of participants were able to sufficiently demonstrate their learning. Regardless, for DAPI participants there were two themes their responses revolved around. The first was their academic performance and the other was the connection to other students with disabilities. Participants in the SSG valued the opportunity to socialize and get help with making friends. Additionally, these findings highlight the strengths and challenges of the two different populations with very differing needs.

Student responses to the rating scale questions indicated more positive experiences. On a scale of 0-10 rating the likelihood that participants would recommend one of the programs to their peers, six rated the likelihood at a ten, five rated it at a nine, and three rated it at an eight. When rating their satisfaction with characteristics of the group eleven students responded they were very satisfied with feeling welcome in the group and three were satisfied. With regard to their experiences with other members, eight participants responded they were very satisfied and six were satisfied. The discrepancy between reflection prompt and perceptions on the rating scales could be indicative of a written expression disability, ADHD, anxiety disorder, etc. The only demographic information collected on the 14 total participants was that they all have diagnosed disabilities and are enrolled with the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) and they are all undergraduate students.

<b>Program Level Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Number of Students Assessed</b>	<b>Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance</b>
Describe the benefits of belonging to supportive social communities	14	
	9	6

*\*\*\*Students scoring 3 or higher on the Sense of Belonging Rubric are considered to display acceptable or better performance.\*\*\**

## **VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Findings**

- A slight majority of participants met the learning outcome; however, this was lower than expected.

- CSD students participating in the School Success Group (SSG) and the Delta Alpha Pi (DAPi) International Honor Society overall are not achieving acceptable or better performance in the CSD learning outcome to describe the benefits of belonging to supportive social communities. These programs have the potential to provide this type of learning for CSD students. However, they were not originally designed with this outcome in mind despite being a departmental activity that mapped with the CSD and program area and learning outcomes. These programs were ad-hoc based on anecdotal experiences and observations of CSD staff.
- It is interesting to note that five of six students belonging to the School Success Group (SSG) participated in the assessment project. This is compared to nine of 29 students in the Delta Alpha Pi (DAPi) Honor Society. These students received reminders to complete the survey during their weekly group meetings. DAPi group members only received the three email invites to participate. Also, interesting to note is that this weekly group of five or six students is facilitated by two professional staff members with a structured curriculum. DAPi members are officially a student organization with a president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary who are largely responsible for meetings and events. While this may give the appearance of a more engaged and responsible student, DAPi members may also benefit from more structured activities.
- DAPi participants often remarked on the positive impact to their academics they have experienced since joining the honor society. These students have already met a GPA requirement of 3.1 in order to be inducted. However, the perceived status of being involved in an academic honor society has pushed them to continue or better their academic performance. This suggests there are benefits to helping students develop a positive self-perception and that additional efforts be made in this area for students with disabilities.
- SSG participant's prompts were mostly short with three of the five responses only having one sentence. Certainly, to some degree this is reflective of their disability. However, it is clear that these students find great personal value in this weekly opportunity to socialize with other members and the staff facilitators. This suggests that these students would benefit from increased, targeted activities to further develop their social and academic communication skills. In the future, a different approach to data collection should be considered and might include controlling for diagnosed disabilities.
- Obvious limitations of this assessment project are the low response rate from the sample population. Furthermore, as just noted above a phone or in-person interview would have yielded more pertinent data to be analyzed and interpreted. The type of disability may impact whether or not the student chose to participate as well as their ability to complete the reflection prompt and is a weakness in this assessment. Both the SSG and DAPi are relatively new supports available to CSD students. SSG began informally in winter term 2017 and DAPi was established at the University in January 2019. These two programs have not been previously assessed and will benefit from findings of this assessment project.
- This year's assessment project will inform all CSD professional staff to find ways to help students internalize the benefits of belonging to a supportive social community, assist students in developing positive self-perceptions in daily or

informal interactions, and finding ways to increase socialization activities for our students.

## **VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action**

### **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that a committee be formed with several CSD staff to review current SSG and DAPi activities and more formally prescribe and create intentional learning experiences for these programs. The learning experiences should be specifically designed with research-based tenets of fostering a sense of belonging for students with disabilities. Additionally, the learning experiences should include regular reflective activities to monitor student learning. As stated earlier, the SSG and DAPi were not originally designed with CSD learning outcomes in mind despite being a departmental activity that mapped with the CSD and program area and learning outcomes.
- CSD students have diverse needs that span a range from support with social communication to developing their academic potential and finding leadership opportunities to engage the University community on disability-related issues. The CSD should collaborate with institutional partners to bring a variety of activities to these programs to meet the diverse needs of CSD students and challenge successful students to go further. The committee established above will determine appropriate departments to collaborate with and detail a rationale along with program improvements due the first week of spring 2022 term.
- As greater numbers of students with disabilities enroll in the University needing reasonable accommodations, the CSD may wish to look into external support programs that have a high-touch format to provide more intensive services for students with communication and social needs. SSG students found great value in an opportunity to socialize and make friends. Additional opportunities to participate in similar and/or more extensive programs should be an available option. For example, CSD staff members Lavonne Kopca, Susan Nash, and Annie Racicot-Snyder attended a presentation by Adam Wouk, the manager of Joliet Junior College. Adam has partnered with various community and corporate entities to create an intensive and affordable program for college students with disabilities that “strives to create an affordable, inclusive and supportive experience in which students with ASD and mental health challenges have the necessary resources to help them thrive academically, Socially/emotionally and developing a career identity”. This recommendation has the potential to take student learning provided through the SSG further and have a stronger impact on student success and retention.

### **Action Plan**

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the action plan below cannot be successfully implemented during the 2020-2021 academic year. Therefore, target dates are delayed until the 2021-2022 academic year to comprehensively implement the recommendations above and actions stated here.

- A committee of 4-5 CSD staff members should be established to research and design activities for SSG and DAPi that have evidenced-based strategies for fostering a sense of belonging or promoting social and academic integration for students with disabilities. A realistic timeline for establishing this committee would be during Spring of the 2020-2021 academic year to detail the charge of the committee and schedule meeting times and locations. The committee will complete its work throughout the 2021-2022 academic year. The committee should provide a report to this writer and facilitators of the SSG and DAPi advisor by week 10 of the Spring 2022 term.
- University departments and staff should be identified that are well-positioned to contribute to promotion of CSD learning outcomes for SSG and DAPi participants. CSD and these University partners should strive to create programming that effectively meets the needs of students and supports CSD, Student Affairs, and University learning outcomes and goals. It will be important to look beyond divisional partners to bring the depth and breadth necessary to create meaningful programming. The committee established above will determine appropriate departments to collaborate with and detail a rationale along with program improvements by week 10 of the Spring 2022 term.
- External community agencies as well as other colleges/universities should be systematically reviewed to determine the efficacy of creating similar student support resources targeted for students with disabilities. In this time of more stringent budget constraints, the CSD should have a goal to identify free or low-cost options. CSD Graduate Interns should lead this endeavor and will lend a student-perspective to the findings. Graduate Interns will also work through the 2021-2022 academic year under the guidance of this writer. The data from this research should be made available to this writer by week 3 of the Spring 2022 term.
- The SSG facilitators and DAPi advisor should be prepared to implement the activities into meetings or events starting in Autumn of the 2022-2023 academic year.

### **Sharing the results**

- The results of this assessment plan would have typically been shared with CSD staff at the beginning of the year staff retreat. However, due to the pandemic and the extension to submit the assessment project, the results will be shared at the first staff meeting of winter term.
- CSD will share the results with students in our quarterly newsletter. Additionally, this writer will be available to meet with students who would like more information. This will include student participants.
- The assessment project will be shared with the University community during the Assessment Symposium to be organized by the Division of Student Affairs. Ultimately, the assessment project will be available on the Student Affairs website for external stakeholders review.

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