



## SUMMARIES FROM SUMMER STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

### **Supporting learning for all students: Strengthening support services for academic achievement (tutoring, reading and writing, advising, library, ESL); embracing the new generation of college students who have the greatest potential to benefit from the environment and experiences we offer**

#### **Questions for today's discussion**

1. The summer discussion noted that “we vastly underutilize our peer tutors, peer mentors and CAs” as resources for support. How might we better and effectively use our students as resources for students?
  2. Although we are a selective college, the reality of K-12 education and demographic changes in the United States is such that some students are academically underprepared, unaware of expectations or do not possess the maturity and/or persistence to be successful at Augustana when they are admitted. We have support systems in place to identify struggling students and provide support for them. These support systems can be enhanced and improved; however, an equally important issue is that many students who leave Augustana prior to graduation do not fit into the struggling student mold. What support systems do we have in place for the “average student,” “the muddler” or the uninspired? How do we create an environment that is inviting to ALL students? To get at these questions, the Taskforce 2 Retention Working Group has been thinking about experiences every first-year student should have. Our goal is to identify key experiences every first-year student should have to develop multiple “footholds” connecting him or her to Augustana so that if one loosens or cracks, there are others that grow stronger. What experiences will help students create footholds? Building on these footholds, are there specific experiences we want all sophomores to have?
  3. Considering the various Learning Outcomes, does Augustana have the right supports in place? If not, where do we need to invest? What barriers exist that inhibit development of these supports?
  4. Another conclusion from the summer was that “there is consensus that much can be done to improve first-year and major advising on campus.” What are effective ways we can improve advising on campus? What is a barrier that prevents achieving the needed improvement, and what are ways to overcome that barrier?
  5. There is clear commitment to strengthening academic supports for students, integrating those efforts and making them accessible and visible in the Center for Student Life. Yet, the potential “stigma” related to using academic supports also was noted in the summer discussion. Based on the Augustana 2020 questions—What can Augustana do, consistent with mission, to encourage more students and families to choose Augustana? What are current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to attracting and retaining a high-quality student body, and ensuring they achieve truly exceptional learning outcomes?—in what ways does Augustana see academic supports as a strength (or does it?) and what is needed to reinforce the advantages of having such supports?
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### **Summer Strategic Planning Discussion Topic**

Supporting learning for all students: Strengthening and investing in support services for academic achievement (tutoring, reading and writing, advising, library, ESL). The questions asked in the summer discussion appear in the summary.

### **Summary of Summer Strategic Planning Discussion**

1. What constitutes academic success at Augustana? What do we do that promotes students' success and what might inhibit it? How will a newly conceived support system address these inhibiting factors?

Success at Augustana should not be defined solely by grades or job outcomes. We seek intellectual and personal growth for every student, regardless of his/her starting level. Understanding and believing in engaged citizenship and the value of the liberal arts is part of that growth as is reaching core competencies (such as oral communication and critical reading), building skills in problem-solving, interdisciplinary thinking, and leadership.

To promote success we try to identify students who need help early and lower any stigma about seeking help. Personal relationships with faculty promote success as does advising and LSFY, but we can do more. We tend to frame the student experience in terms of discrete silos (athletics, clubs, academics, etc.), which makes it difficult for students to establish connections between different aspects of their experience. We miss educational opportunities because not everyone on campus feels like an educator, even though each of us has a role to play in student growth.

Students' needs vary as do the inhibitors of success. Some mid-range students slip through the cracks and are not pushed enough. Many students are over-involved and collect majors and minors simply because they can. Other students are too shy to ask for help, and still others are overwhelmed by the prospect of their futures. To help students overcome these hurdles, we can better utilize our current resources by connecting them to each other, making resources available to students at the time of day when they need them (4-10 p.m.), improving the training of peer tutors and encouraging students to use their professors as resources.

2. Considering the climate of limited resources, how might we better support students who come to us with diverse needs and levels of preparation, including groups such as first-generation students, international students, multicultural students, transfer students, struggling and high-achieving students? How might we do this without attaching the stigma of "needing help" to one of "helping them meet greater intellectual challenges"? (Some things to consider—What types of student support services, structures and efforts should gain a greater allocation of our resources? What services are we not addressing?)

We have many highly effective resources on campus; however, they are not centralized. This creates problems for students, faculty and staff in terms of access to services. Students do not know where to go for specific types of help, and faculty/staff don't know where to refer students. A comprehensive website describing services is a good start as is a triage/concierge desk in the CSL that could point students to the correct office for their concerns. We vastly underutilize our peer tutors, peer mentors and CAs. Better training and higher expectations would benefit both the tutor/mentor/CA and the students with whom they work.

Our first-year experience (LSFY), honors, advising and tutoring models came up in discussions as places to modify to better support students.



3. How can we improve first-year and major advising so that it can be a distinctive strength of an Augustana education and help our students succeed?

There is consensus that much can be done to improve first-year and major advising on campus. Some improvements require minimal resources, such as developing a robust advising website with information for both advisors and advisees. Workload, curriculum and a more comprehensive view of advising and the role of campus community members as “advisors” are more complex challenges in developing advising as a strength of an Augustana education.

The disparity of faculty advising workloads across campus needs to be addressed. Including advising as part of the teaching load was discussed as was the need to assess advising and recognize outstanding advisors. Several groups discussed opportunities to link LSFY to advising by having first-year advisors teach a section of LSFY. There is some concern that credit-heavy majors reduce the time that students can spend exploring disciplines outside of the major, and we might take a hard look at how our majors are constructed.

Professional development on how to advise under our new advising philosophy is absolutely necessary as is better communication between campus constituencies about what each of us does in our major/office/department.

4. The new Center for Student Life will house the library, the Reading/Writing Center and many student support services. How can we fully take advantage of efforts to relocate these and other such support services, including a faculty enrichment center, to a more central campus location to build connections between these services, offices and programs?

Both virtual and live means of connecting services, offices and programs were identified. Ideas ranged from a comprehensive website/hub including YouTube video introductions to offices to a 4th-floor CSL concierge who can connect students to the service they need. A publicity campaign is necessary to educate the entire campus community about the services available on campus and where to find them. The real-time connection of being able to walk students from one office to another to introduce them to another resource is vital.

But we also need to think outside the box. Symposium Day provides a unique opportunity to build connections among offices. Friday Conversations occasionally could be held in the CSL. Faculty could hold advising sessions in the CSL or in residence halls, etc.

However, there is apprehension regarding “shoving more stuff into the library.” We must be careful to preserve and defend quiet study spaces on campus. Some attending the session wondered why all services need to be centralized, particularly the faculty enrichment center and tutoring.