Campus Life Office
Division of Student Life
Westmont College

External Review Report
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Submitted by
Dr. Mark Troyer and Review Team

Review Team
Dr. Mark Troyer, Vice President for Student Development, Asbury University
Leigh Remy, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Students, Dartmouth College
Dr. Jane Wilson, Assistant Professor of Education, Westmont College
Daniel Clapp, Resident Director of Emerson Hall, Westmont College
Introduction

The review team would first like to thank Angela D’Amour and the Campus Life Office staff for the excellent communication, preparation and hosting of the review team prior to, and during the external review process. Materials were delivered in a timely manner, and preparation and communication prior to the review were very helpful and well organized. The visit itself, though busy, was pleasant, efficient and a great experience for the team. We want to especially thank Angela for the willingness to flex and adjust the schedule periodically and for arranging wonderful weather as a couple of us came from very cold climates!

The Review Visit

It was helpful to have the materials sent ahead of time in a notebook that the reviewers could examine and form some initial understanding of the operations of the department and of the context (thanks for including the organizational charts) in which the Campus Life Office operates. Especially helpful was the history document which gave some good background on the iterations of how this office has been organized and focused in the past.

It should be noted that it was especially helpful to have a broad representation of the Westmont community invited to take part in interviews with the committee. Over 50 individuals including senior administrators, Student Life staff, faculty, administrators and students were included and invited to be interviewed by the committee. It was very beneficial to have a good representation of each of these groups with close to 20 students of varying levels of involvement with the Campus Life Office and 8 faculty members participating. It was very helpful to have Dr. Wilson and Danny Clapp as part of the team due to their tenure and broad understanding of the campus.

The committee felt that the Westmont personnel were willing to be frank, honest and respectful in the “probing” despite the team sometimes asking tough questions. It is apparent, (though not without periodic bumps and conflicts like any other campus) that the faculty, staff and students at Westmont truly respect and feel good about the Campus Life Office staff and about the Student Life office in general.

The Report

This report will be organized in such a way as to try to pull out major themes that the team observed and to give some periodic examples that support those themes regarding commendations and challenges. We realize that our overall view is limited by time and exposure to the culture of Westmont, and by the materials provided, but are fairly confident as a committee that in most areas we saw enough triangulation to affirm our summary observations.

The final section of the document will provide some considerations and recommendations based on our observations, knowledge of best practices and experience with other campuses. These recommendations should be taken as friendly ideas and suggestions for how to improve what seems to be a department that has an overall good reputation and healthy functioning on this campus. We also realize that the context and climate in which the review is being conducted is not a time where schools are significantly expanding staffing levels and funding for new
programs so the team was conscious of the challenges involved in recommendations that include significant expanding of services or offerings.

Themes

The team found it challenging to address specific themes in the Campus Life Office without addressing and summarizing broader campus culture themes that help frame the context in which the staff operates. We offer these themes first.

Lots of programs, some coordination/collaboration
The committee found that Westmont is a campus where lots of things happen. There seem to be significant programming expectations across campus including Campus Life Office Student Organizations, Residence Halls, Intercultural Programs office, clubs/organizations, and academic departments. The wide range of campus events (e.g., activities, athletics, music) sponsored by faculty, staff, students, admissions, and other departments seem to compete for space, priority and PR.

Although responsibility for programming areas is broadly defined by office missions, there are areas of overlap. Community members routinely noted that although collaboration was a shared value, the organizational culture fostered collaboration primarily through relationships rather than organizational structures. The absence of a single centralized events calendar (one exists for external audiences but is focused on major campus events), the space scheduling process, and confusion about the continued existence of an annual calendaring meeting were examples staff shared of structural changes and/or tools that could foster closer collaboration at the campus level. Within Student Life, staff discussed a spring program preview for the upcoming academic year and more routine updates within the Deans Council meeting as possible tools for fostering more meaningful collaboration.

One senior administrator stated the there is a “culture of radical de-centralization” here and that the “campus fights control and formulas.” While excellent programs and events do occur, this culture makes it easy for ambiguity to be present on who is responsible for program success and allows for some randomness in program offerings.

Culture of student leadership/responsibility for events/programs
There seems to be a long-standing history of significant student initiative and involvement in leading trips, events, and programs at Westmont. WCSA, WAC, Potters Clay, Emmaus Road, WSM, SPIC, and Spring Sing all rely on significant student leadership. The committee affirms this culture, but also points out that sometimes it seems to create a tension in how to shape or develop the direction the students take with projects and events. Campus Life Office staff is charged with advising, but seem to not feel as much freedom to direct or shape programming within the student organization culture. Fiscal responsibility, safety concerns, and program quality were all mentioned as rationale for close advising of student missions and organizations.

Some staff and faculty affirmed the “intentional/philosophical” approach to allowing students to take ownership in significant programs; others suggested that with lack of large staffs this was a
way to still have important co-curricular programming occur even though there wasn’t the direct staff oversight that could in fact be helpful if funding and resources were available. As staffing has been added in the Campus Life office, advisors sometimes wonder how much supervision or direction to offer students.

Some staff and faculty were not aware of the overall responsibilities or structure of the Campus Life Office, though most who interacted directly with Angela, Michelle or Jeremy had very positive things to say about their work and impact.

“Collaboration and silos”
We often heard the term collaboration, but with mixed and sometimes conflicting reactions. The Campus Life Office staff were cited as being more than willing to collaborate and were praised for collaborative work on initiatives such as Focus Week and Leaders Retreat. Other statements about collaboration seemed to infer that it was encouraged in Student Life but tough to carry out. As a very busy office, there seemed to be a tendency to operate independently from others in the office or in the division. The term “silo” was used on a number of occasions to describe how the different offices in Student Life sometimes operated.

One staff member shared that the Dean’s council was discussing a larger “Student Life Curriculum.” The Review team strongly supports this type of effort as it would bring some practical “handles” to programming goals. It would also encourage interdepartmental and intradepartmental dialogue on how the identified issues and topics are being covered on Westmont’s campus.

Staff well respected
As interviewees described Angela, Jeremy, and Michelle’s interactions on campus, they were typically in very respectful and appreciative terms. Students often mentioned the mentoring aspect of their leadership and the individual attention and care given to their development. They feel known, empowered, and free to “make mistakes” which they identify as important to learning. Faculty appreciated the work of the Campus Life Office and the quality of programs that they are involved in.

Desire for addressing relevant, contemporary topics
Focus Week was quoted often as a good model of collaboration, an example of sophisticated programming and a thematic approach to exploring important topics. A number of people expressed interest in more campus programming around pressing current issues. Town hall meetings and rapid response-type events were cited as important to continue to develop.
Commendations

In this section we happily pass on some “kudos” and encouragement in areas that were consistently identified as strengths for the Campus Life Office. General commendations are those overarching positives about the personnel or programs. We thought it would also be helpful to identify some specific things that were cited as positive and those are included as well.

General
A mentoring mentality came across as we explored the interactions that the staff had with students. The idea that Angela, Michelle and Jeremy pour into the students with whom they have a relationships was strong. Their interest in developing students as whole people is obvious. The staff seem to spend a lot of time with individual students in advising and pouring into their life via one-on-one times, coffee chats etc. This is important, but should also be balanced with the other duties in running their programs and office.

Faculty and staff seemed to speak favorably about the interactions they had with the Campus Life Office staff and that the staff were open to suggestions and ideas. The CLO staff has done an excellent job asking for and welcoming feedback. They use the feedback to make adjustments to future programs/events Multiple people mentioned Michelle’s handling of a faculty member’s critique of orientation and that she responded in a positive and professional way; her appearance during the Faculty forum was noted as strategic, informative and collaborative. A number of staff and faculty mentioned the skill set that Jeremy brings to the missions and ministry area and are appreciative of some more active involvement and supervision in those important Westmont programs. Angela’s leadership and ideas were mentioned multiple times and faculty and staff were encouraged that she had come back to Westmont and that the office “has never functioned as well as since she arrived”.

Staff and faculty mentioned on a number of occasions they appreciated the collaboration that occurred and that activities generated through this office are generally of high quality. There was a sense that more collaboration and involvement in programs would be appreciated.

We applaud the desire to have a more specific and targeted focus and direction on programming targets and curriculum.

Specific
The campus life staff have initiated some new programs and continued with some traditional programs that were mentioned. We cite here some specific commendations on things we heard multiple times.

- Student Leader retreat at the Islands was a hit and should be continued.
- First year retreat was appreciated by freshmen who attended. Students liked John Young’s session about how to get the most out of Westmont and perhaps that could be added to the overall orientation schedule.
- Publicity for big events seems of higher quality lately.
- Principle of Leadership Live lunches is great, tweaking of content and who is targeted to attend may be useful.
Focus Weeks were cited often as a good collaborative effort, potential for more of this type of programming that addresses current events and issues was mentioned numerous times.

Taiko Drum event was great example of collaboration.

Jeremy’s advising and work with trips to bring budgets back in to order was mentioned a number of times.

Orientation itself seems to be well received, a couple in the division mentioned they would like to have a bit of time at the event somewhere… (Intercultural Programs and Office of Life Planning) Orientation can support recent gains in diversifying the student population by underscoring the value of intercultural awareness for all students. Additionally, President Beebe expressed a long term interest in broadening the focus on life-planning. This dialogue could be introduced during Orientation.

The overall feel of the review was that the office is in a positive trajectory and that even in the last year there have been improvements and positive things happening. Angela’s leadership in the office was mentioned as a positive often.

Future Challenges

In an environment of limited resources and tight budgets that aren’t necessarily expanding, it is important to maximize time and resources and to work smarter and more efficiently in delivering quality programs and services for students. The Campus Life Office will need to continue to evaluate best ways to spend time, prioritizing what is important for the campus and to seek ways to work together with others to achieve sometimes overlapping goals and objectives.

Westmont in general is a very active campus with many educational programs being offered and often it seems that even within Student Life some departments aren’t aware of what other departments are doing. A future challenge will be to work toward a four year curriculum of student development activities and programs. Additionally, an important challenge will be to develop a more centralized calendar or system of communication where constituencies on campus can be made aware of activities, events, programs.

A specific challenge for the Campus Life Office will be to identify the niche programming for which they are responsible. With a clear focus of their programming, the Campus Life Office will want to communicate their offerings to the campus as a whole and in particular to the Residence Life Staff and other areas within the Student Life Division.

We would also encourage the staff to continue to dialogue on the balance of advising versus directing when it comes to student organizations and leaders. It seems that the historical culture has been more “hands off” with student groups sometimes to the detriment of their own leadership development. There seems to be an open window of opportunity to be more intentional and carefully directive in leading students in their own planning and programming so
that leadership development is occurring while at the same time events and programs are being offered that meet the goals of the department, division and College.

Programming for first year students is a future challenge that will need some continued evaluation and recommendations. It seems on Westmont’s campus to have “multiple owners.” Residence Life has first year RDs, Michelle Hardley is involved in the academic side of supporting and advising first year students, and Michelle Mollkoy is charged with co-curricular programs supporting first year students. We also heard at least once of discussions of possible academic classes for first year students. It seems that clarification and strategic planning for this area is needed and will likely take a task force of some sort at least with the Provost’s Office, Campus Life Office, Residence Life and Michelle Hardley’s office involved.

Another challenge is to determine how to address student’s spiritual formation. We discovered at least three different departments that were attempting or had attempted to create some formal small group ministry of some sort. Capax Dei, bible study groups out of the Campus Pastor’s office, small groups created through residence life, and small groups created through Campus Life office were all attempted with varying levels of success. As a Christian college this is an important issue and for sure spiritual formation is occurring in a variety of ways and through a broad range of people, but a potential future challenge for the Campus Life Office is to determine its role in any formal approach to spiritual formation.

The Women’s retreat was a great addition and planning could include multiple departments which would also give it more credibility and exposure. Staff expressed interest in being involved in the planning of this program. Recent work with student athletes was also recognized as worth continuing. Strong Collaborations can emerge here with staff in Athletics.

**Recommendations/Considerations**

The committee realizes that any recommendation or considerations are based solely on our review of the materials and on the visit interviews as well as some knowledge of what other campuses may be doing in these areas. The Westmont culture and approach to student life as well as any staffing strengths and weaknesses would obviously need to become the lens through which to evaluate these recommendations and considerations. With that disclaimer, the committee recommends that the Campus Life consider the following:

**Campus Activity/Programming Audit**
The committee identified literally hundreds of expected programs that were happening or planned throughout campus. It would be beneficial for someone (perhaps even a student worker, intern, student leader) to conduct an audit of all the activities or educational programs that were offered by Campus Life Office and organizations, Intercultural programs, Residence Life, Chapel topics, Life Planning office and other student development related areas. Additionally other programs through institutes, academic departments or other organizations could be added.
This process will give a broad view of the types of events and programs available to students, and the committee believes it would show overlaps and possible collaborative partnerships that would allow Campus Life Office (and other departments) to operate more efficiently. It could also serve as a catalyst to revisit and improve the learning outcomes document.

Additionally, there seems to be some excellent quantitative data that could be mined through some of the national assessments that get at issues of students leadership growth and activity involvement on campus. Specific questions on the CIRP, NSSE and other instruments regularly given through the provost’s office could help to assess growth and progress.

**Leadership Training Audit/Campus Leader Inventory**

The term “Student Leader” seemed to be used at Westmont (at least through the Campus Life Office) to be those students involved in student organizations paid through student fees. In addition to the residence life staff (RAs), there are also many other “student leaders” on campus that could potentially benefit from some intentional leadership development. Athletes, worship bands, club presidents, admission office workers, even student managers in work-study positions could be considered student leaders. Additionally there are many staff and faculty on campus that are actually doing leadership training. By doing an audit or inventory of possible student participants and partners who are doing leadership training it would help the Campus Life Office evaluate the next steps in determining whether to move forward on any type of broader leadership training.

There was some level of interest expressed by the athletic department, by some students involved in clubs, and by the campus pastor’s office, and by intercultural programs to include their students in some type of common leadership event(s) or training. The trick would be to partner and maximize some of the expertise already on campus and to create a culture of leadership development.

The beginning of the year period seems like a time where many student groups are here early for training and practice and preparation. Even a common commissioning service or common devotional times with a leadership challenge or theme that is common could begin to bring a broader range of student leaders together and create a culture of leadership development.

It would also be beneficial to the department to explore curricular connections, reviewing the curriculum and developing a listing of academic courses that further an understanding of leadership. Monitoring work being done by the experiential learning task force and staying apprised of discussions of a first-year course would also be beneficial.

**First Year Students Task Force**

We mentioned this previously in the section on challenges. In order to further define the specific first year student programs needed, it may be helpful to create a task force to meet a few times over the next semester to give direction to a more coordinated effort in supporting and programming for first year students.
Centralized Calendar
The Campus Life Office could be a catalyst for creating dialogue on a more centralized process for adding dates and events to a master programming calendar on campus (similar to the academic calendar and athletic calendar created in “google calendars”). We understand that the Dean’s Council has started discussions on a Student Life Curriculum that could shape what type of programming should be occurring over the course of a year or four year period. The review team applauds this effort and encourages a broader discussion on a master calendar and even master calendar meeting that would help foster collaboration, awareness, and communication on campus events.

Staffing Structure
With the task areas involved in the Campus Life Office the review team felt that it would be beneficial to at least consider possibilities of organizing the office differently. This would also include creative staffing considerations such as an RD assigned ¼ time to Campus Life office, student internships assigned to particular areas within the Campus Life Office, or even Campus Life Office staff somehow intersecting more formally with Campus Pastor’s office or Intercultural Programs office.

Faculty Involvement
There was a pleasant surprise in that faculty were pleased when they were asked to contribute their time and expertise in areas of student programs that made sense and honored their skills. Inviting faculty to be a part of Focus Week groups, student leaders retreat, orientation program or leadership lunches could continue to enhance the credibility and relationships across campus and between faculty and Student Life Staff. Additionally, there seemed to be some encouragement from faculty to explore with the Provost’s Office the idea of allowing students to get credit for “serving society and acting justly” through participation in student ministries.

Conclusion
The overall impression of the Campus Life Office was that of a staff of very talented and dedicated people. The office is respected on campus even though there isn’t always consistent understanding of how the office is organized. Collaboration is attempted sometimes successfully and sometimes with tension. There is very good programming and mentoring coming out of Campus Life and there is the potential to be a catalyst for more efficient and effective cross functional teams that maximize staff and programming time and offer broader leadership development opportunities.

We were privileged to be able to spend time with the faculty, staff and students of Westmont and hope that some of the ideas and observations will be helpful in the continued growth and development the Campus Life Office. We feel that with some creative exploration in staffing and job descriptions, some higher levels of coordination and communication could occur that would result in a more efficient offering of important student programs and development.