

A Meaningful Initiative: Developing the Dean of Students at the University of  
South Florida St. Petersburg

By

Hannah Hutchings

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the University Honors Program

University of South Florida St. Petersburg

December 5, 2016

Thesis Director: Jamie Molnar

SOCAT Case Manager, Office of the Dean of Students

University Honors Program  
University of South Florida St. Petersburg

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

Honors Thesis

---

This is to certify that the Honors Thesis of

**Hannah Hutchings**

has been approved by the Examining Committee on December 5, 2016

as satisfying the thesis requirement of the University Honors Program

Examining Committee:

---

Thesis Director: Jamie Molnar  
SOCAT Case Manager, Office of the Dean of Students

---

Thesis Committee Member: Jacob Diaz  
Dean of Students/ Director of Housing and Residence Life

**Abstract:**

The Office of the Dean of Students (DOS) at the University of South Florida (USFSP) provides three primary services to the campus community: the Student Conduct Office, the Title IX Office (sexual education), and the Students of Concern Assistance Team (SOCAT) which includes the SOCAT Case Manager. Data analysis will determine how the DOS office is viewed by the campus faculty, staff, and students, including the office's purpose and current services offered. The data will also reveal current challenges facing the campus' students, faculty and staff. Qualitative research will be conducted through both staff and student interviews and quantitative data through student surveys. The data will be analyzed, from which, five meaningful, impactful, and purposeful recommendations will be suggested for future implementation.

### **Introduction:**

The Office of the Dean of Students (DOS) at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg campus (USFSP) offers three main services to the campus community: the Student Conduct Office, the Title IX Office (sexual education), and the Students of Concern Assistance Team (SOCAT) which includes the SOCAT Case Manager.

This thesis was first brought about as the head administrator of the SOCAT team, the SOCAT Case Manager, had noticed a growing need for educating students on preventative measures for managing varying levels of distress. The Case Manager had noticed a reoccurring theme throughout the caseloads reflecting the need for meaningfully educating students on pre-intervention as it relates to student mental health and well-being, which significantly impacts levels of distress. Providing support, guidance, and education to students is key in promoting a safe and caring community. It also fosters an educational environment that promotes learning, studying, and personal growth.

The DOS therefore wants to be a key stakeholder in the promotion of care and concern for students at the university, especially to those students who may be experiencing a difficult situation or who may be going through a personal challenge.

The purpose of this thesis seeks to investigate how the DOS is viewed on campus by students, faculty and staff by conducting interviews and surveys. This paper will highlight current student, faculty/staff, and campus community challenges. Through analysis, the later portion of this paper seeks to provide the DOS with helpful and meaningful recommendations that may be implemented in the future based on the true needs of the campus community as a whole.

### **Introduction to the Literature Review:**

USFSP's new Office of the Dean of Students (DOS) houses the Students of Concern Assistance Team (SOCAT), led by the SOCAT Case Manager. The SOCAT branch of the DOS will foster the proposed recommendations for the future. In order to best understand the importance of these recommendations, the literature review first examines the historical foundation of the DOS both at USFSP and more broadly in Student Affairs. The review will then discuss the purpose of the DOS and provide evidence for how it serves as a vital component of the university. The perspectives of administrators within Student and Academic Affairs as well students are reviewed. More broadly, current challenges facing college students nationally are noted and are thoroughly discussed. The review will end with supportive suggestions for how to address those student challenges on a college campus.

### **Literature Review:**

#### **The History of the Dean of Students:**

Dallas Long (2012) gives valuable insight into the foundational history of the DOS in the United States, by first stating that the groundwork of student affairs dates nearly all the way back to the colonial era. He states that during this time, the academic departments provided many different services beyond just teaching academics, as the responsibility of these young and not yet fully matured students fell to them. Further, the faculties were typically understaffed yet still had to monitor other areas of student development, including areas such as student conduct and student life and engagement. Long states that as a result, the faculty essentially became the second parents to students. He then mentions that this method of managing student development

worked well until the 1800s, at which time the Americans began to notice more effective programs that were working in German and other European universities. The European universities “viewed the faculty’s exclusive responsibility to be the training of the intellect” (p.3). Long then states more and more students came to the American universities to obtain degrees, the faculty sought to mirror that exact idea of having faculty with specific roles focusing on academics. This shift in thinking narrows the faculty member’s responsibilities from student conduct, student life and engagement, and academics to having the faculty members focusing purely on academics. With this shift, Long explains that the academic faculty began to spend most of their time educating themselves on their specific areas of study and allocating much of their time to conducting research to gain more knowledge on subject matter so that they may best know how to teach the subject matter to the students.

With most of their time being focused on content matter, there was little attention given to monitoring and mentoring students. The initial idea of the faculty being the “in-loco parentis,” or of being the second set of parents, in the early colonial times had completely turned about (p.2). Thus, students became more in charge of their own well-being, they began learning how to be more responsible and self-accountable. Long explains that the early 1900’s marked the time where student government was created and codes of honor were introduced as a way for students to show other students what is favorable and unfavorable behavior. This newer student perspective helped to promote these much-needed life skills both during the university and after graduation.

Long mentions that the 1920s brought about the Dean of Men, which over time evolved into the Dean of Students. He says the Dean of Men was meant to act as the “president” of the

institution, with the rules and conduct enforced through this department. The Dean of Men comprised itself of a grouping of faculty that were educated on how to motivate, and guide students into becoming effective and intentional members of society.

According to the University of South Florida website (2016), the USFSP campus' history as it pertains to the Dean of Students, began on July 1, 1965 when the parent university, University of South Florida Tampa (USF) purchased the site for the St. Petersburg campus. This site originally served its purpose as an overflow campus for the main USF campus. Over time, the St. Petersburg campus began the process for its own separate accreditation and according to USF's main site, in the year 2006, it was granted. In a small amount of time, the campus experienced massive change; from being completely reliant on the USF campus for systems and processes to being its own separate entity.

As the university grew and student population increased, so did the number in need for services addressing the holistic experience of the student. Data from the annual USFSP SOCAT report (2015-16) described the increasing number of students experiencing personal challenges that affected their academic success such as mental health concerns, general well-being, significant academic issues, medical concerns, and suicidal ideation/thoughts.

The SOCAT Case Manager position was initially formed nearly two years ago as supportive intervention and guidance for students to intervene on these issues that previously administrators were struggling to address. Since then, the office has experienced tremendous growth and there is now a clear need to continue to develop the program to meet the needs of campus needs. The SOCAT annual report showed that since the hiring of a case manager, from the year 2014-2015, the total amount of students referred grew from 71, from the years 2014 to

2015, to 123, from the years 2015 to 2016. This shows a 73% growth rate in the amount of students referred through the office, and this number continues to grow steadily.

### **The Purpose of the Dean of Students:**

The Dean of Students is dedicated to ensuring that all students have the right to a safe, engaging, quality education at the university. The team works collaboratively to uphold many vital values that are foundational to the university, including student advocacy and support. Long discusses many esteemed values to be upheld in student affairs, of which, educating the whole student, student care, equality, and community are essential to a university.

### **From the Administrator's Point of View:**

Research has been conducted to determine the perspectives of student affairs administrators and what they believe college students commonly face as problems during their time at the university. Among this research, Amy Reynolds (2013) clearly notes that students are experiencing more health issues on the college campus. According to Reynolds, these common health issues include high levels of depression, anxiety, suicidal and self-injurious behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and other serious mental health issues. Reynolds also reported that mental health issues are becoming an increasing concern on college campuses as well, and noted that administrators spend a considerable amount of time resolving these problems that have already occurred. This may suggest a need for educating students on prevention of student mental health issues as well as how and when to seek services on campus. Reynolds' study indicated the following as the most frequent student concerns professionals



addressed: student stress, time management, academic difficulty, and financial concerns. It also indicated that the most frequently reported concern was anxiety, which is a mental health concern. Further, the most challenging student concerns student affairs professionals observed were cited as suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and self-harm. Key findings from the administrator's perspective, from Reynolds' study were that daily living was more of a common concern with students than were any other health issue. Conversely, Reynolds states that the health issues were more challenging to address than were daily living problems.

Student concerns from the perspective of administrators is further discussed by Sharrika Adams, Sherry Hazelwood, and Bruce Hayden (2013) as they discussed the intricacies of managing student cases within the student of concern branch. It was widely cited that the roles of the student affairs administrators providing case management are to provide a safe and secure campus, resources for students, services to those who have learning disabilities, encouragement for healthy living and the skills to confront unhealthy behaviors. The authors also introduced a model to show a balanced model for student affairs case management, which includes four parts: assessment, student advocacy, student empowerment, and providing follow-up and resolution. The authors state that the process begins as the 1) student is assessed and the case manager learns about the incident and becomes informed. Once the case manager understands the situation, he or she may then work on the second and third portions of the model. The second and third portion, according to the authors are 2) student advocacy followed by 3) student empowerment. The case manager is to appropriately advocate for the student and provide the proper resources allotted by the university. The case manager is also responsible for guiding the student in a caring and

supportive manner, towards learning how to be responsible for his or her own situation. The authors state the final part in the model, which involves the 4) follow-up and resolution, where plans with goals are set in place so that the issue at hand may be resolved. This model provides a specific and necessary structure for the student affairs case management process, which allows for an effective means of resolving difficult issues.

### **Student Perspective of the DOS:**

A noteworthy study examined how student leaders viewed the DOS. Ryan Bouchard's work (2015) brought to light many great perspectives that are important to consider. The study demonstrated that true care and support from the student affairs team allowed the student leaders to feel they were being heard from and that they were truly experiencing advocacy from the team. The study also revealed that a strong and well-developed DOS office within a university allows student leaders to feel that their opinions and ideas may be voiced and heard well and that they may have the support that they need.

### **Problems Worth Addressing Amongst College Students:**

Reynolds makes note of a survey given by the American College Health Association which revealed that almost 18% of college students have experienced depression and 12% have experienced anxiety. The study also revealed that nearly 10% of students have reported seriously considering suicide, and 45% of students have had difficulty functioning at times. Reynolds states that these factors directly affect student performance and therefore call forth the need to be addressed by higher education. Student well-being is a significant concern of the university as it

directly affects the overall goal of the university, which is for students to experience their education in a safe and supporting learning environment so that they may be prepared, and productive members of society. Students facing mental health issues often have trouble reaching this goal. It is the responsibility of the university to address these issues and work one-on-one with both the students and staff to help students overcome these challenges.

Another issue worth addressing is stress within the college environment. Nancy Ahern and Anne Norris discuss their findings of stress in the college environment in their work (2011). Their findings revealed that higher levels of stress increased risks for mental health problems in this age group and that in the study, males reported more stress than females, which directly counters the notion that females typically experience more stress than males.

Within the Dean of Students offices, mental health issues are a significant concern, but in recent years sexual violence has also become a major area of concern. The “Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments” marks the starting point of addressing these concerns as the amendment requires universities that are receiving federal funding to directly respond to any kind of sexual violence or harassment experienced by a student at the university in order to ensure equal access to education (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2016). The amendment required the universities to attend to the needs of the students so that the student may be given access to an equal education. This act states that it is the responsibility of the university to provide resources and support to help empower and enable students that may have encountered any kind of sexual misconduct or crime based on gender.

The Journal of Forensic Nursing brings forth staggering information and statistics in Garcia’s article (2012). Garcia reports that nearly 60% of sexual assault cases go unreported and

are not advocated. Garcia mentions that the lack of reporting may be due to the students feeling afraid, unsure, or uneducated on the topic of sexual violence and as a result, they may let these personal experiences pass them by without considering its implications onto their very own lives. Garcia explains how this statistic is significant within the university as it shows, given three students, just one student would feel comfortable enough to seek help and support from the university.

### **Recommendations:**

When considering approaches for resolving some of these evident problem for students, it is important that administrators take into account individual student need, campus environment, campus size, and many other components of the university that make it a unique and individual campuses. Ashley Knight (2014) discusses how excelling within the college community goes way beyond just meeting expectations but works towards implementing the best practices and growing in using them. Knight recommends that student affairs professionals exemplify excellence. She states that additionally, both administrative and student leaders must model great behavior for the rest of the team and must be willing to implement effective leadership skills.

Knight mentions how communication skills must be practiced throughout the entire team. Effective communication includes relaying information to the rest of the team members in a timely manner, being responsive to other's needs or concerns, and taking the time to build strong relationships between the members of the team. She also states that being open to communicating and being centrally goal directed are amazing strategies to further improve the environment for the students so that they may feel safe and ready and motivated to learn.

Concerning sexual assaults and sexual cases, the statistics and the data supporting students who do not advocate for themselves requires intervention to where students may know how to advocate for themselves, who to talk to, and what steps may be taken to overcome this issue as oppose to just simply ignoring the matter. Garcia's article gives many helpful suggestions for how to address this issue in the college environment as she says that students need to learn that the campus is a "talk about it" environment and that advocacy is highly supported by the staff and fellow students at the campus. Students must be educated on what is acceptable and what is unacceptable within a relationship. Students must know what may be done if a partner oversteps his or her boundaries. Most importantly, students must know of the resources that are already provided for and how accessible they are for the student.

### **Methodology:**

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods for review. Qualitative data was collected through student and faculty interviews, and quantitative data was collected through surveys given to students. Both research methods provided helpful data that led to a deeper understanding of the need of the campus community, including staff, faculty, and students. The overarching theme of exploration was the DOS goal of promoting a safe and caring community for all students at the university. Questions for each section were organized into three sub-themes, which correlated directly to the main purpose of this study. The three themes were to discover 1) student and faculty's past and current understanding of the DOS' Office and what is offered, 2) the view of the current community and any challenges students might be facing, and 3) current and proposed ideas for promoting a safe and caring campus community.

Strategically, key stakeholders were asked to expand upon their knowledge, experience, and expertise through personal interviews. This portion of the study is vital as it allowed for a rich understanding of individual experience of the participants and highlighted the various perspectives, for the DOS to utilize when developing the goal of a safe and caring campus community. Further, student surveys produced quantifiable responses, which gave considerable insight into the perspective of the student body. Together, both methods allowed for a full understanding of the campus community as a whole so that meaningful, data driven recommendations and possible programs could be suggested as a result.

### **Research Methods:**

The in-depth interviews produced a well-rounded cognizance of the campus community at USFSP, including current awareness of the DOS, current challenges and needs, and how they may be best addressed by the DOS in the future. In-depth interviews were a key component in revealing each individual's perspective, experience, and expertise. With this method comes a small degree of freedom and flexibility, as pre-designed questions provided consistent structure, but could also be slightly adjusted to each conversation. Further, open-ended questions providing for extensive conversation, which allowed for deeper insight and understanding of the viewpoint of the interviewee. Fourteen pre-selected stakeholders (which included staff, faculty, and students) were given the opportunity to express their opinions, concerns, and questions. These questions were organized into four sections so that themes and similarities and differences may be clearly identified.

Quantitative data was collected through an online survey created on Campus Labs. This method produced numerical data, which was then compared to data collected from the interviews. The survey was an extremely helpful component to the study as it produced general themes from students. General thoughts or trends were quantified and noted for further analysis. The survey questions were closed-ended and students were given a series of pre-selected questions to answer. Campus Labs provided data analysis for review.

### **Interview process:**

Pre-selected student leaders, faculty and staff both from academic and student affairs were asked to participate in an interview for thirty minutes to share their knowledge and experience of the needs of the campus community. The interview included four sections (which, to see interview questions, see Appendix 1). Section one focussed on how the participant fits into the campus community which allowed for a better understanding of roles and titles on the campus as well as how each participate interacts with the student population and serves the campus community as a whole. Section two focused on current awareness of the services provided at the USFSP DOS and how the office may or may not be currently promoting a safe and caring community. Participants were asked specific questions about their understanding of who the DOS is, the purpose of the office, the services that are currently offered, and any experiences, positive or negative, that they might have had with the DOS. Section three explored challenges that USFSP students may be facing. Section four focused on current and proposed methods for promoting a healthy, safe, and caring campus community. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the responses.

### **Survey process:**

The survey was open to all 4,725 USFSP students (nearly 87% commuter and nearly 13% residential students) for a total of three weeks. There were 4 sections in total. Section 1 included demographic information: residential/ commuter student, length of time at the university, class ranking, age grouping, and gender identity (for a sample survey, see Appendix 2). Section 2 explored student past and current understanding of the DOS' Office and what is offered, section 3 included the view of the current community and any challenges students might be facing, section 4 explored current and proposed ideas for promoting a safe and caring campus community. The survey took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and students were offered participation in a raffle, separate to the student survey (to protect identity) as an incentive for participation.

### **Results:**

#### Results from Interview Questions:

The following section provides both the questions and relevant data collected from in-depth interviews with campus stakeholders.

#### Section 1 (Introduction: Campus community leaders: Who they are and what they do):

Understanding current community leaders and how they fit into USFSP community and promote a healthy, safe, and caring community



1. Please introduce yourself and describe your role here at USFSP, including which division and department you work in.

From the 14 interviews, participants identified as follows: 4 student leaders, 5 student affairs as staff/faculty members, 3 academic affairs as faculty members, 1 Enrollment and Marketing Services, and 1 from the University Police Department.

2. How long have you been at USFSP?

The participants' experience at the university ranged from 6 months to 33 years.

2a. Have you maintained the same role throughout your time here at USFSP?

Ten of the participants have maintained the same role through his or her time at USFSP and/ or has maintained his or her initial role and has added additional roles to his or her workload. Four participants have changed his or her initial roles since being here at USFSP.

3. What direct services do you provide in your role to the student body at USFSP?

4. What direct services does your department provide to the student body at USFSP?

5. In your words, how does your department contribute to supporting a safe, healthy, and caring community?

12 of the 14 participants stated that they see themselves as serving students by acting as a resource that connects students to other resources when needed. It was also noted that 8 participants stated that they offer a one-on-one relationship to students who need someone to talk

to or confide in about a situation. The participants seemed to generally see themselves as someone who helps guide students on how to feel connected to the campus community. There seemed to be a general consensus amongst many participants about the need for building a sense of community between on-campus students and non-traditional students (such as commuter and transfer students, of which the campus has a high percentage enrolled).

Section 2 (Community Awareness of the DOS: Past and Present): Understanding of the purpose of the office, knowledge of the services provided, and personal experience with the DOS

1. Can you describe your understanding of the purpose of the new DOS office here at USFSP?

All of the participants expressed a general understanding of the purpose of the DOS. Participants described the purpose of the DOS office as a place to go if someone feels threatened or if someone has concerns about a student's mental health, as a place students may receive help during a crisis, a place that advocates for students, and a place that serves as a point of contact for students in distress. A participant stated that the DOS is viewed as a central hub for issues related to students. One participant said, "The DOS is not a negative thing, it's like the triage office, where things are sorted out and determined whether or not it needs referral". One other participant described the DOS as a "conductor of a large orchestra".

2. Can you list and describe the services that are currently offered through the DOS here at USFSP?

Interview data indicated that newer student leaders to on campus do not have a clear understanding of the services offered through the DOS. Additionally, 3 faculty members in academic affairs who are not as connected to student affairs, also did not fully understand the services offered through the DOS office. When asked this question, these particular participants described services offered through other areas of student affairs, which demonstrated that the parameters of the DOS (within student affairs) are not clearly defined.

3. Have you had any interactions with the DOS staff at USFSP?

3a. Yes: Can you describe that experience, including who you interacted with and why?

3a. No: Has anything prevented you from interacting with the DOS staff or has there simply not been a need yet?

All participants who had interactions with the office of the DOS overwhelmingly reported positive and helpful interactions with the DOS. Participants described in detail personal interactions with the DOS and how the DOS demonstrated capability and expertise when handling students in distress.

One participant mentioned that the DOS serves as a spectacular resource, mentor, and advisor to students, which demonstrates the ability of the DOS staff to listen, learn about students, and express care and concern to students.

The DOS is capable of handling students in distress as the office works with many campus partners to provide quality help to students in distress. A participant mentioned that he is involved with the DOS staff/ services in a “cross-disciplinary team” to provide information to one another.

4. What services have you personally referred students to or utilized from the DOS?

4a. Yes: Was that experience helpful?

4b. No: Can you expand on why you have not referred or utilized services yet?

4c. Are you comfortable referring students to the DOS in the future if needed?

For the participants who have had experience referring students to the DOS office, they again overwhelmingly agreed that the experience was helpful and that they felt comfortable referring students and reporting students of concern. One participant stated that faculty are indeed directly using DOS services when needed. Another participant stated that the DOS is capable of handling students in need so the participant feels comfortable utilizing the resources of the DOS office. Additionally, SOCAT is a resource that is being used by many of the participants and they would all agreed that it is a helpful and useful service in the DOS.

Section 3 (Understanding the Current Student Community): Student and staff leadership perspectives on challenges our current students may be facing

1. Do you perceive our campus as a safe and caring place for our students?

1a. Yes/No: How do you see our campus as being safe/unsafe, caring/uncaring?

All of the participants indicated that they perceive the campus as a safe campus. Participants were able to describe some safety features advertised on campus that helps students to feel physically safe, including the blue emergency lights around campus, cameras, constant police presence and monitoring, parking patrol, and email and text alerts. A participant from the

University Police Department mentioned that statistically, we are a very safe campus and that the crime statistics are actually steadily decreasing.

One participant stated that students feel emotionally safe, as well as that the USFSP campus is very open and accepting to differing sexual orientations, political views, religious views, genders, races, or ethnicities.

All of the participants agreed to the campus being a caring place for students. One participant stated that care for students is exemplified as faculty work together to solve student issues to give students the best experience at the university.

2. Do you think students perceive our campus as a safe and caring place?

2a. How have you come to that conclusion?

All of the participants stated that they believe that USFSP students feel that the campus is a safe and caring place. One participant mentioned about students feeling physically safe as students do not have to put much thought into thinking about their personal physical safety when walking around campus. Students may feel physically safe around campus, even when walking to extensive parts of campus.

Another participant agreed to students only feeling somewhat safe as he stated, “students feel relatively safe, not all, but for the most part.

A participant stated that many students may feel included into the campus community, however some may not feel as connected and as a result may not feel not as cared for by the campus, including students who would identify as socially awkward or students who may be in the LGBTQ community.

3. We believe that students in a safe and caring community would feel comfortable communicating with staff and faculty about challenges they face or unhealthy and unsafe behaviors they see. Do you think this is happening in our community?

Student comfort and trust between staff and faculty and student safety are two key factors that affect whether or not a student feels comfortable reporting an unhealthy or unsafe behavior that they might see, according to many of the participants. Seven participants (three of which were student participants) agreed that students are more likely to trust their peers as compared to administrators, despite faculty and staff attempts to be as available and connected to the student population as possible when students are facing a difficult issue or problem. One participant suggested that students wouldn't want to address adults first before their peers for fear of getting someone in trouble. However, participants noted that when a student's safety or the safety of the community as a whole is put at risk, then students would be more likely to communicate these concerns.

4. What challenges do you see students facing that might negatively impact their well-being?

When asked about student challenges, the participants provided a wide variety of answers, however, the most common response to student challenges was a lack of a sense of connectedness to the university, as 8 participants stated this. 4 participants also stated a lack of resilience when it comes to dealing with stress and anxiety as a challenge that students are currently facing. An interesting comment made by one of the student participants was that many students, especially commuter students or non-traditional students, are juggling more than just a

course load, as they have jobs, a family, and much more that they are carrying as well. These may present additional challenges to students as they face additional responsibilities on top of their initial academic responsibilities.

5. What challenges do you see students facing that might negatively impact the wellbeing of the campus community as a whole?

The participants most commonly described student connectedness as a challenge that impacts the campus community as a whole, as 8 participants stated this. One participant expressed how difficult it is to reach the commuter population and to help them feel more connected to the campus community, which is the high majority of the student population.

An interesting comment made by one of the participants was that students are not allocating enough time for personal wellness, which may then impact how students are connected to the university. Students are taking on more and more responsibilities beyond those responsibilities in the classroom, and the idea of students exercising or taking time for wellness is not as present as it could be.

6. If a student sees their peer engaging in any kind of unhealthy or unsafe behaviors, ideally we would want that student to feel comfortable reporting the situation.

6a. Do you think students feel comfortable reporting unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that they see?

Two participants mentioned that reporting unhealthy or unsafe behaviors greatly depends on the student's background and past experiences. Another response was that reporting is contingent on whether or not a given concern affects the student's own personal safety as well,

according to four interviewees. This means that students mainly report concerning behavior if it threatens them or the safety of the community. Of particular interest was the response that there is a lack of students feeling comfortable with reporting because there is a fear of getting someone in trouble or some sort of retaliation, which goes back to feelings of personal safety.

6b. Do you think students know how to report unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that they see?

One participant said that they understand that students learn how to report through subliminal signs on posters, through syllabi in class courses, and through residence hall leaders. Four participants stated that the students living on-campus are more likely to know that they can report any concerns to their Resident Assistant, who are fellow peers. Five participants seemed unsure if a commuter student would know how to report a concern and to whom they should report a concern to. One of the student participants, who is also a commuter student, said that she would know a direction to turn to but she would not know the exact route for how to report a situation that could be concerning.

6c. How well do you think our students are educated on bystander intervention?

Nine participants agreed that more time needs to be spent educating students on the bystander intervention piece. Additionally, many participants were unsure of the current bystander intervention orientation, which is the only education provided to date, is retained by students after they begin school. This is an important question that should be explored in the future.



Section 4 (DOS Programs: Focus on the future): Proposed methods for promoting a healthy, safe, and caring campus community:

1. Moving forward, how do you think the DOS can continue to promote a safe, healthy, and caring campus environment?

Eight participants stated that moving forward, the DOS must examine its current infrastructure, which includes staffing, resources, office location, and consider expansion in the future. Currently, the office is understaffed and the location is not central on campus or easy to find, which may be confusing for both students and faculty and staff. One participant specifically stated that the DOS needs additional staff to focus on the growing numbers of students in distress so that other campus stakeholders can focus on their particular roles and responsibilities. Yet another participant stated that the DOS needs a central location that is welcoming and inviting to students.

Participants also suggested that the DOS needs to work on becoming more recognizable to the student population. One participant stated that the services are currently only recognizable to over-involved student leaders and needs to be broadened to all USFSP students. Another mentioned that it is important that the services and intentions of the DOS be consistently promoted to students so that they know that they are not alone when in distress. Of interest was the response that the office should utilize the large and well-watched TVs located in the University Student Center to deliver the DOS message to students.

A few participants mentioned that it would be helpful to have written procedures and trainings for faculty and staff to help them better understand reporting processes as they have concerns about students in distress.

Additionally, many of the participants stated that the intentions of the office need to be voiced more clearly to students. For example, one stated that “students need to be made aware that the DOS is a positive place... this needs to be communicated”. Another mentioned that some students might not be aware that the office is a helpful place, they do not fully understand that the office is there to help and not discipline students.

2. If the DOS were to provide a student-led program that promotes a safe, caring, and healthy campus environment in the future, what would you like to see them create and why?

Eight participants stated that they would love to see the office create a group of “student ambassadors” that promotes and represents the DOS office. This group of students would educate the campus on this mission of services of the DOS. This group would have students invested and showing care for one another, and could provide peer to peer education. Many suggested that this group would be collaborative with other existing clubs and organizations on campus.

#### Results form Online Survey:

### USFSP Cares: Fall 2016 Survey

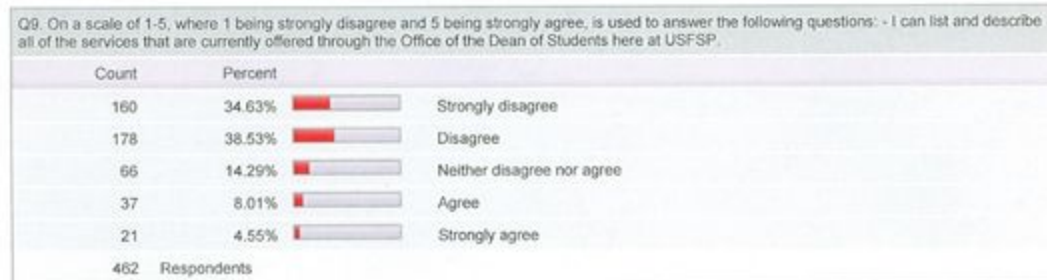
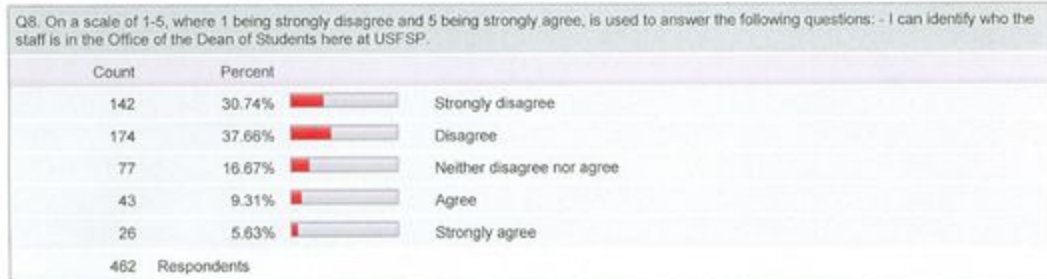
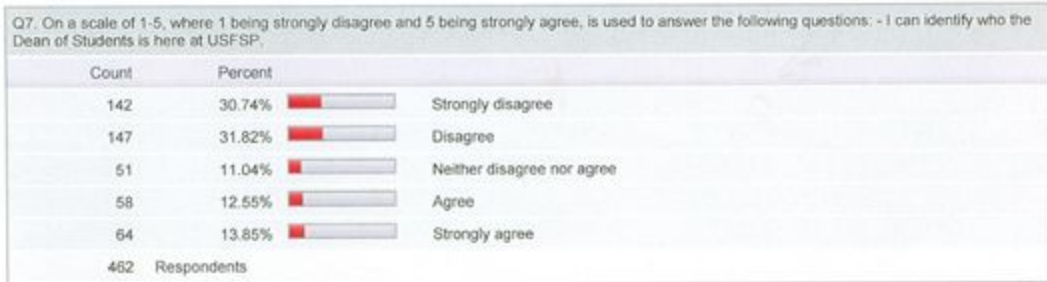
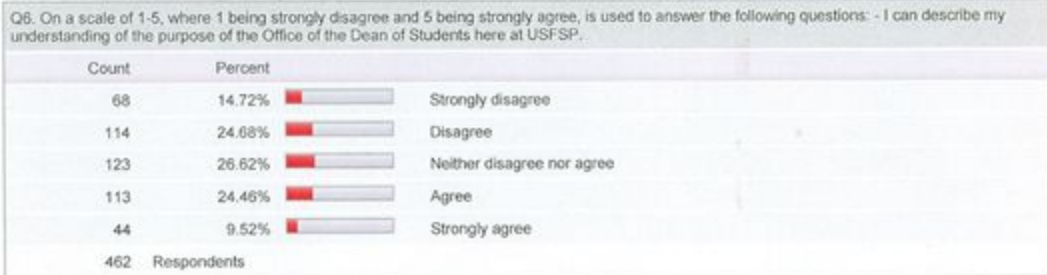
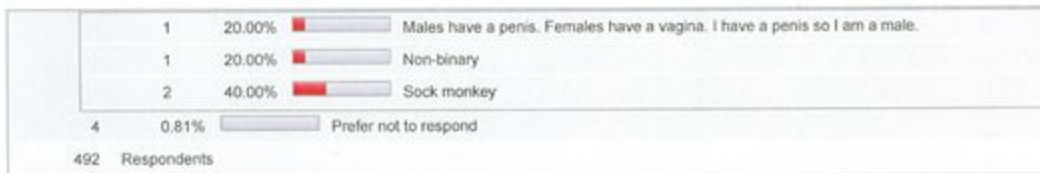
Description: I want to give incentive, but I don't want any personal information to be linked to the original survey responses. Can you set up a separate survey for personal information if respondents indicate that they want to be considered for incentive? I want to do 3-4 increments for surveys (weekly).

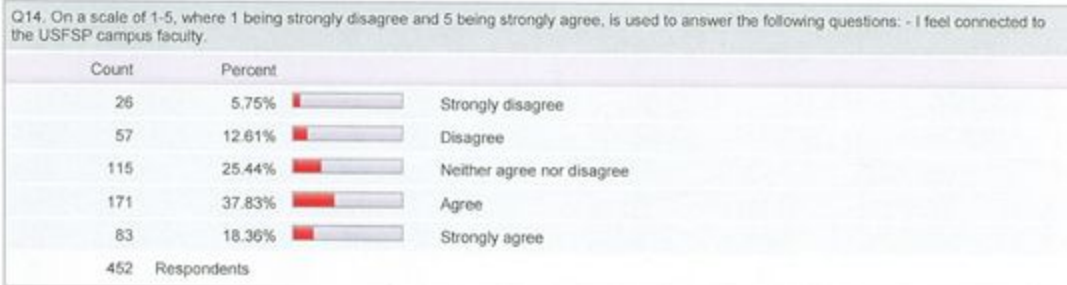
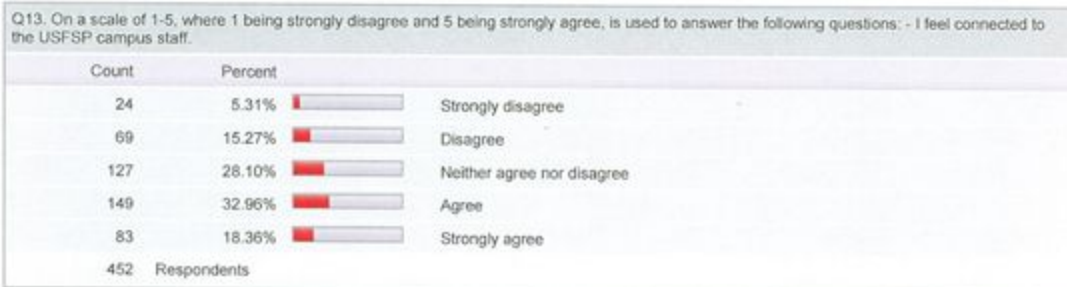
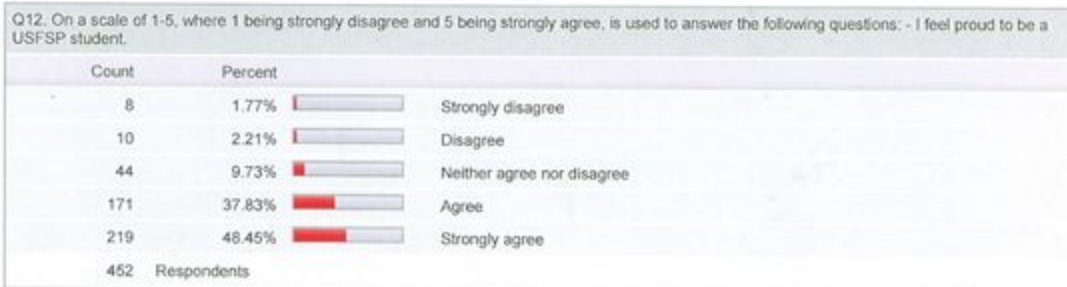
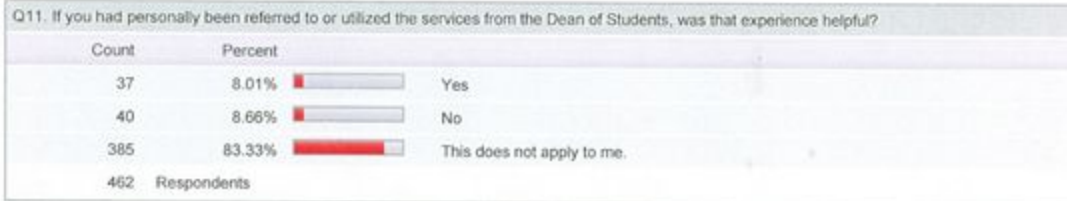
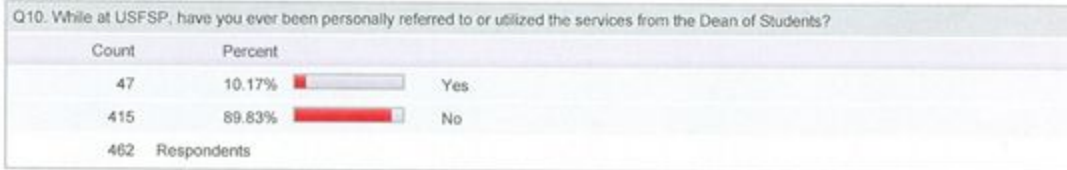
Date Created: 9/23/2016 11:36:49 AM

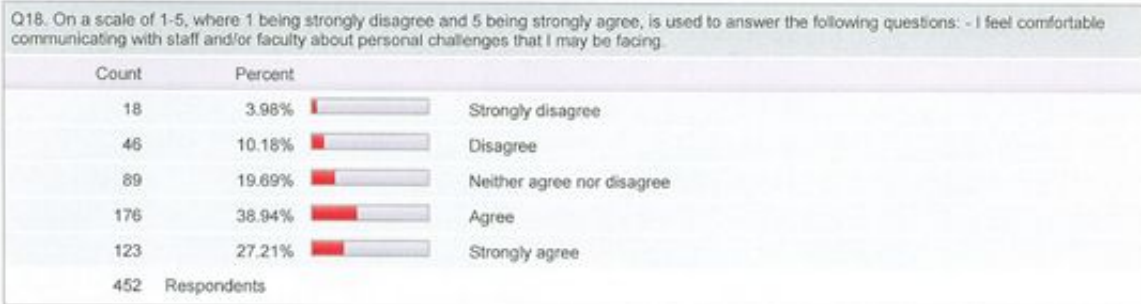
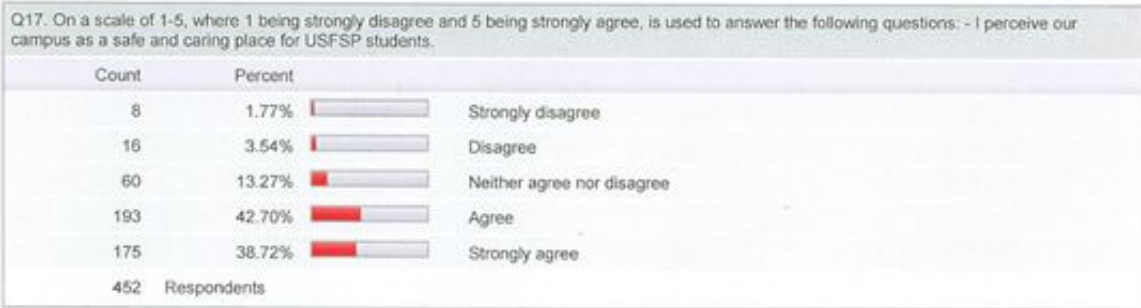
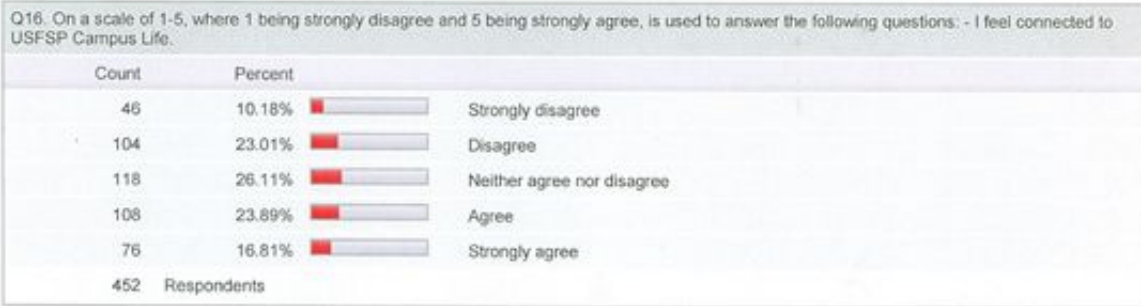
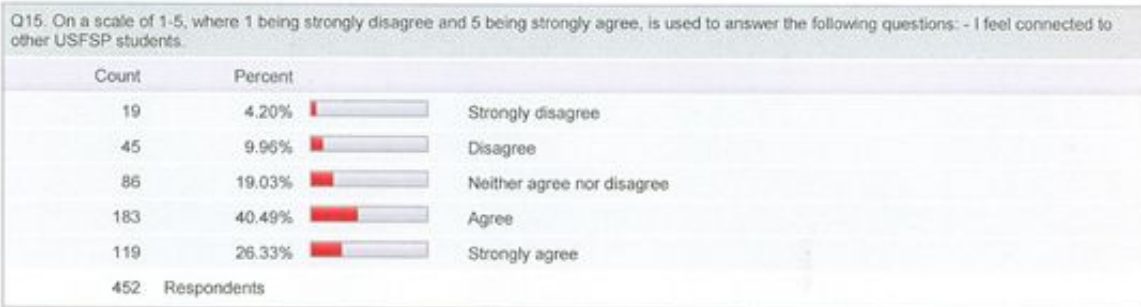
Date Range: 10/10/2016 12:00:00 AM - 10/28/2016 11:59:00 PM

Total Respondents: 492









Q19. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, is used to answer the following questions: - If I were to see a peer engaging in any kind of unhealthy or unsafe behaviors, I would feel comfortable reporting that situation to staff and/or faculty.

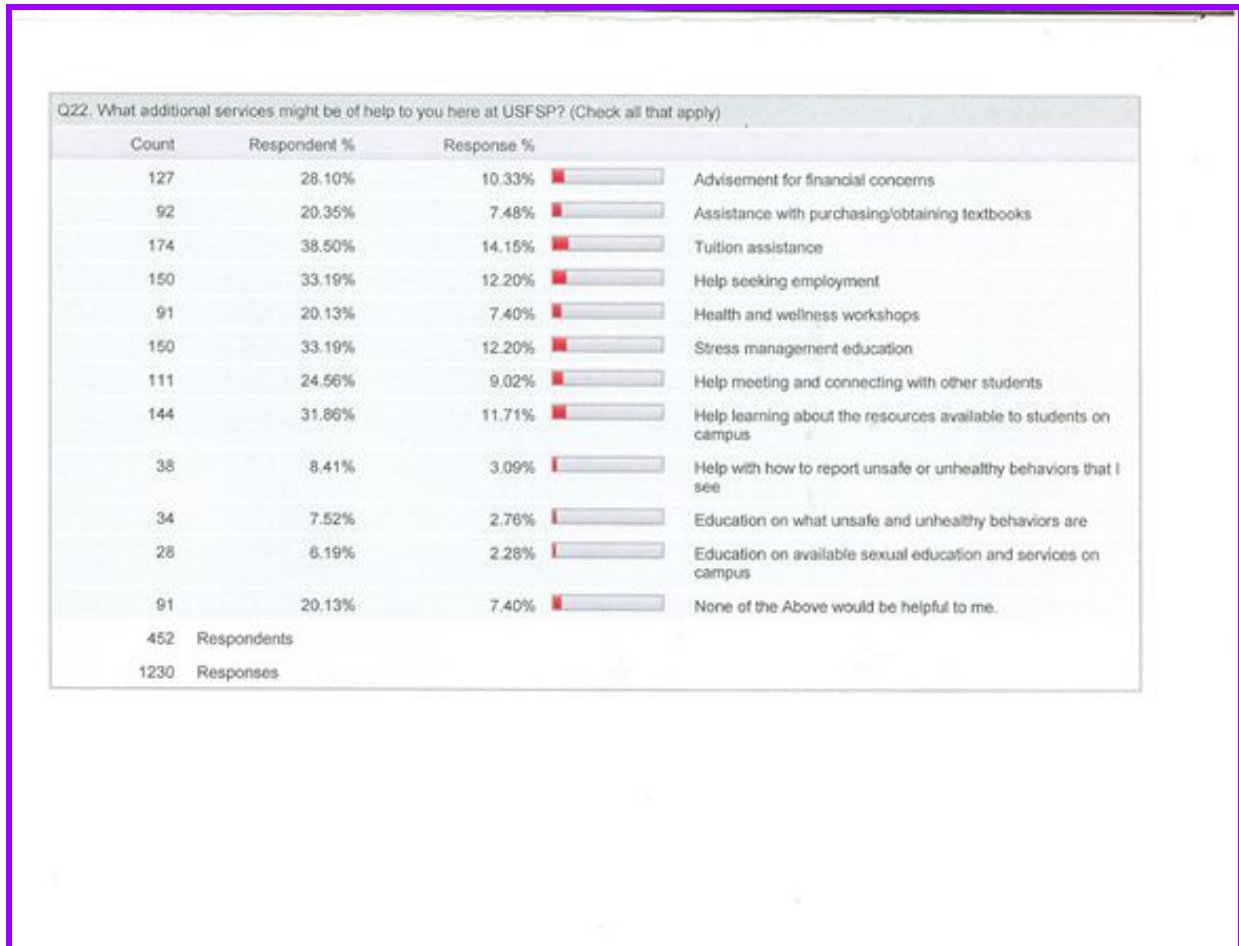
Count	Percent		
10	2.21%		Strongly disagree
37	8.19%		Disagree
118	26.11%		Neither agree nor disagree
170	37.61%		Agree
117	25.88%		Strongly agree
452 Respondents			

Q20. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, is used to answer the following questions: - I know how to report unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that I may see on campus.

Count	Percent		
14	3.10%		Strongly disagree
63	13.94%		Disagree
73	16.15%		Neither agree nor disagree
176	38.94%		Agree
126	27.88%		Strongly agree
452 Respondents			

Q21. Are you currently facing any of the challenges listed below? (Please check all that may apply)

Count	Respondent %	Response %	
108	23.89%	14.84%	 Academic difficulties
154	34.07%	21.15%	 Financial concerns
72	15.93%	9.89%	 Mental health concerns
151	33.41%	20.74%	 Difficulties managing stress
55	12.17%	7.55%	 Health issues
2	0.44%	0.27%	 Sexual assault
186	41.15%	25.55%	 I am not currently facing any of the challenges listed above.
452 Respondents			
728 Responses			



**Discussion:**

The results from both the faculty, staff, and student leader interviews and student surveys produced invaluable data. The following section discusses the relevance of the data collected for the USFSP campus. The discussion will cover 1) awareness of the DOS office, the services that it offers, and its intentions, 2) current student challenges, and 3) how the DOS may continue promoting itself and what the office may do in the future to further promote itself and become more integrated into the campus community.



The first section discusses the findings from the data including the awareness of the DOS office, its purpose and services offered to students. From the online survey data (taken by students, 70% of those commuter students and 30% residential students), it was determined that some students know the purpose of the office and some students do not know the purpose of the office (35% and 40% respectively). Additionally, the majority of students who took the online survey, did not know the DOS (60% did not know the DOS), the staff that works within the office (70% did not know the staff), or the services that are provided through the office (74% did not know the services currently provided). In contrast, all the involved faculty and staff members, along with the student leaders who were interviewed could summarize the purpose of the DOS office. This clearly demonstrates that the more connected the individual is to the campus community, the more likely he or she is to be aware of who the DOS is and how the office serves the students.

The survey indicated that only 10% of the students used the services offered through the DOS, and half of the students thought their experience was helpful. In comparison, all of the participants that were interviewed described their experience with the DOS as helpful and stated that they would feel comfortable utilizing the resources in the future.

A challenge that was expressed in the data was student connectedness. Students were asked to rate themselves on how much they agreed or disagreed to feeling connecting to staff, faculty, other students, and campus life. Students felt most connected to other students (66% of the students agreed or strongly agreed to feeling connected to other students, 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed) and least connected to the campus life (40% of the students agreed or strongly agreed to feeling connected to campus life, 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Another challenge that was expressed in the data was student resiliency. Four campus faculty and staff relayed in the interviews that students are struggling more and more with finding ways to effectively cope with stress and anxiety. The presents personal challenges to students and then challenges to the overall campus community.

A high majority of the participants in both the surveys and interviews agreed to feeling safe at USFSP overall. When it came to reporting, most students felt comfortable reporting and communicating challenges to faculty or staff members. Students are also knowledgeable on how to report, while they might not know all processes available to them, they feel comfortable confiding in faculty and staff members, which is important. For example, a student interview participant, who is a transfer student, could not identify a direct route to report but did feel comfortable going to her professor. This is an important distinction, as it demonstrates that students do feel connected to staff and faculty (50-53% of students either agreed or strongly agreed to feeling connected to staff or faculty, 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed), which increases the likelihood of reporting concerning and/or distressing behaviors or events.

According to the student survey data, current student challenges that the DOS can address include tuition assistance (14% of students mentioned that this may be helpful service), help seeking employment (12% of students), stress management education (12% of students), and advisement for financial concerns (10% of students). When students were asked what additional services might be helpful to them here at university, students' third highest response was that they wanted to learn more about the resources available on campus. This information can help the DOS tailor their marketing message accordingly.

Overall, all data indicated that a student-led group could be extremely helpful in the promotion of the DOS and potential resources the office could offer. (This will be further explained in the Final Recommendations section)

### **Final Recommendations:**

Based on the data collected, this section provides a list of final recommendations to the university on how to best develop the Office of the Dean of Students in the future and continue to promote the message of care and concern to the campus community. Interview participants were asked 1) how the DOS can continue to promote their office and 2) if the DOS were to create a student-led initiative in the future, what would you like to see them create and why? All participants gave very helpful feedback, from which researchers were able to derive two consistent and very important themes: DOS branding and DOS resources. From these two more general themes, five specific recommendations with detailed explanations and suggestions were created.

1. Office location. Many of the participants from the interviews mentioned that the current location of the office must be given thought, reporting that students and staff are confused about where to find members of the office. Currently the office is fragmented both in branding and location. There are three staff members on the team and they are separated into three separate locations on campus, which makes it difficult for faculty, staff and students to seek help from the office when needed. This fragmentation of the office causes much confusion amongst the campus community, as seen in the data where 70% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to knowing who the staff is in the office of the

DOS at USFSP and 74% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed to knowing of the services offered through the office.

The office needs to brand itself in a way that clearly shows students who they are and what they do so that students who may be in distress or in a difficult situation, may receive the proper help that they need, and office space, decor, and location are an important part of this messaging. A centralized location is therefore a key component in delivering this unified, centralized messaging. The office also needs to consider how it is advertising itself as welcoming and available for the campus community. The three staff members are planning to move into a remodeled building together in the near future, so it is suggested that the office consider this advertising message in the future, including purchasing signs to help direct the campus community directly to the new space.

2. Office Staffing. A strong foundation is essential for the DOS if additional programs are to be created, and both staffing and office resources are a key component of this. As indicated in the interview data, the lack of structure and clear role description within the DOS has led to much confusion amongst the campus population. DOS staff have multiple roles, which means staff, faculty, and students are unclear about who works within the DOS and what their roles are. For example, a student and a staff member from the interviews perceived the current DOS, as the Director of Student Life and Engagement. Currently, the DOS holds many roles including the roles of the DOS, Title IX coordinator, and the Director of Housing and Residence Life, which several interview participants could not identify. Additionally, 60% of students surveyed were unable to identify who the DOS is and what the office does. This lack of understanding from the

campus community demonstrates the need for clear roles and strong branding from the office.

As the campus continues to grow, so will the number of students experiencing challenges and requiring assistance. Specifically, there is not a separate role dedicated to Title IX concerns and there is currently only one person responding to students in distress. This needs to be considered as the numbers of students experiencing student crisis's continue to increase (data from annual reports demonstrate a 73% increase in distressed student concerns from the previous academic year). National data on best practices for resources when managing students in distress should also be considered. This would ensure that at-risk students are receiving appropriate interventions and support.

3. Continued education on reporting procedures for faculty, staff, and students. It is important to make sure that professors and other faculty and staff members know what to do if a student comes to them with a concern. The survey data indicated that 60% of the student population does not know who the DOS is, yet the data indicated that students do know how to report (68% either agreed or strongly agreed to knowing how to report). The questions then is, who are students reporting to if they do not know who the DOS is? This may be an area for future study. Students could be going to their professors as a way to report concerns in the campus community. For many commuter students, professors may be their only connection to knowing about how they may receive help through the DOS as the survey data revealed that 53% of students as feeling connected to professors. It is therefore important to promote continued education and trainings to faculty and staff

on how to manage distressed students who come to them with a personal concern or challenge, who to report to, and how to do so. By providing faculty and staff with this ongoing training, it would allow the office to consistently promote its brand of care and concern to the campus community.

4. Care and Concern Student Ambassadors: In the future, the DOS office could create a group of students to serve as the “Care and Concern Student Ambassadors” for the DOS office. As the majority of the population at USFSP is commuter students, (nearly 87%) this group of students may both promote the services that are offered through the office and represent the office in a way that reflects care for all students at the university. The “Care and Concern Student Ambassadors” may educate students on who the DOS is, the purpose of the DOS office, the services that are provided, and the intentions of the DOS, which is to provide quality support and student advocacy for the students at the university. This group additionally would serve the campus as it would have students invested and showing care for one another. Students will feel more connected to the office from peer-to-peer promotion. The survey data indicated that USFSP students feel more connected to each other more than they feel connected to faculty and staff and more than they feel connected to campus life ( 66% of students either agreed or strongly agreed to feeling connected to other students, 52% agreed or strongly agreed to feeling connected to campus staff and faculty, and 40% agreed or strongly disagreed to feeling connected to campus life). The “Care and Concern Student Ambassadors” would further promote the messaging of the office, develop the student aspect of branding, and help

promote awareness of the office to other students, with the aim of all students knowing where to go if they need help.

5. Reorientation: Both interview and survey data showed that more time needs to be spent educating students on bystander intervention. The survey data indicated that most students (60%) of students do not know who the DOS is and currently, the only education on the topic of bystander intervention is only included in orientation. Many of the interview participants were not clear on the information taught during orientation, and some did not even know it was occurring. This is the only bystander intervention education provided to date at the institution. Providing students with more consistent opportunities to learn about bystander intervention and the DOS office's mission and resources available to students through small reorientation, student ambassadors, and educational presentations/programming would be of great benefit to the campus community. Future research should explore best practice in frequency and mode of delivery for this information. This reorientation would further promote the messaging and brand of the office and in a consistent and purposeful way.

The data demonstrates that these 5 recommendations will help the DOS office and staff continue to promote and deliver the very necessary and important work to the campus community. Additionally, these recommendations will ensure that the message of care and concern remains consistent and known to students, staff, and faculty at USFSP. Through effectively branding the DOS office and providing for appropriate resources within the office,

the DOS can really have an impact onto the USFSP campus community through making itself really known and available to students who could be in need of their help.



## References

- About USF: History. *University of South Florida*. (2016). Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www.usf.edu/about-usf/history.aspx>.
- Adams, S. D., Hazelwood, S., & Hayden, B. (2014). Student affairs case management: merging social work theory with student affairs practice. *Journal Of Student Affairs Research & Practice*, *51*(4), 446. doi:10.1515/jsarp-2014-0044.
- Ahern, N. R., & Norris, A. E. (2011). Examining factors that increase and decrease stress in adolescent community college students. *Journal Of Pediatric Nursing*, *26*530-540. doi:10.1016/j.pedn.2010.07.011.
- Bouchard, R. T. (2015). An exploration of leadership: The dean of students through the eyes of student leaders. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *75*.
- Campus sexual violence resource list. (2016). Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/campus-resource-list>.
- Garcia, C. M. (2012). Preventing sexual violence instead of just responding to it: Students' perceptions of sexual violence resources on campus. *Journal of forensic nursing*, *8*(2), 61-71.
- History | University of South Florida. (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from <http://www.usf.edu/about-usf/history.aspx>
- Hyun, E. E. (2009). A study of US academic deans' involvement in college students' academic success. *International Studies In Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council For Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, *37*(2), 89-110.

Knight, Ashley. (2014). Excellence in community college student affairs. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/store/10.1002/cc.20096/asset/cc20096.pdf?v=1&t=indzurpx&s=3d0927de409acc9109fb478062d4ea2d87e35be2>

Long, D. (2012). The foundations of student affairs: A guide to the profession. In L. J. Hinchliffe & M. A. Wong (Eds.), *Environments for student growth and development: Librarians and student affairs in collaboration* (pp. 1-39). Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries.

Molnar, J. (n.d.). *SOCAT Annual Report (2015-2016)* (Rep.).

Research Guides: Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: 8. The Discussion. (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2016, from <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/discussion>

Reynolds, A. L.(2013). College student concerns: Perceptions of student affairs practitioners. *Journal of College Student Development* 54(1), 98-104. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved April 23, 2016, from Project MUSE Database.

The student personal point of view. (June 1937). Retrieved from

[https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Student\\_Personnel\\_Point\\_of\\_View\\_1937.pdf](https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Student_Personnel_Point_of_View_1937.pdf)

**Appendix 1**

Interview Questions:

Section 1 (Introduction: Campus community leaders: Who they are and what they do):  
Understanding current community leaders and how they fit into USFSP community and promote  
a healthy, safe, and caring community

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your role here at USFSP, including which division and department you work in.
2. How long have you been at USFSP?
  - 2a. Have you maintained the same role throughout your time here at USFSP?
3. What direct services do you provide in your role to the student body at USFSP?
4. What direct services does your department provide to the student body at USFSP?
5. In your words, how does your department contribute to supporting a safe, healthy, and caring community?

Section 2 (Community Awareness of the DOS: Past and Present): Understanding of the purpose  
of the office, knowledge of the services provided, and personal experience with the DOS

1. Can you describe your understanding of the purpose of the new DOS office here at USFSP?
2. Can you list and describe the services that are currently offered through the DOS here at USFSP?
3. Have you had any interactions with the DOS staff at USFSP?
  - 3a. Yes: Can you describe that experience, including who you interacted with and why?
  - 3a. No: Has anything prevented you from interacting with the DOS staff or has there simply not been a need yet?
4. What services have you personally referred students to or utilized from the DOS?
  - 4a. Yes: Was that experience helpful?
    1. Yes: Can you describe how it was helpful?
    2. No: Can you describe why it was not helpful?

- 4b. No: Can you expand on why you have not referred or utilized services yet?
- 4c. Are you comfortable referring students to the DOS in the future if needed?
  - 1. Yes: Can you describe why?
  - 2. No: Can you describe why?

Section 3 (Understanding the Current Student Community): Student and staff leadership perspectives on challenges our current students may be facing

- 1. Do you perceive our campus as a safe and caring place for our students?
  - 1a. Yes/No: How do you see our campus as being safe/unsafe, caring/uncaring?
- 2. Do you think students perceive our campus as a safe and caring place?
  - 2a. How have you come to that conclusion?
- 3. We believe that students in a safe and caring community would feel comfortable communicating with staff and faculty about challenges they face or unhealthy and unsafe behaviors they see. Do you think this is happening in our community?
  - 3a. Yes: Can you expand on that?
  - 3a. No: Can you expand on that?
- 4. What challenges do you see students facing that might negatively impact their well-being?
- 5. What challenges do you see students facing that might negatively impact the well-being of the campus community as a whole?
- 6. If a student sees their peer engaging in any kind of unhealthy or unsafe behaviors, ideally we would want that student to feel comfortable reporting the situation.
  - 6a. Do you think students feel comfortable reporting unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that they see?
    - 1. If yes: Can you expand on why you feel that way?
    - 2. If no: Can you expand on why you feel that way?
  - 6b. Do you think students know how to report unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that they see?
    - 1. If yes: Can you expand on that? How do they know?
    - 2. If no: Can you expand on that? Why don't they know?
  - 6c. How well do you think our students are educated on bystander intervention?
    - 1. Can you expand on why you feel that way?

Section 4 (DOS Programs: Focus on the future): Proposed methods for promoting a healthy, safe, and caring campus community:

1. Moving forward, how do you think the DOS can continue to promote a safe, healthy, and caring campus environment?
2. If the DOS were to provide a student-led program that promotes a safe, caring, and healthy campus environment in the future, what would you like to see them create and why?

**Appendix 2**Section 1 (Introduction):

(Choose the option that best describes you)

1. I am a (commuter/residential) student.
2. I am a (freshman (0-29 credits) /sophomore (30-59 credits) /junior (60-89 credits) /senior (90+ credits) /graduate student).
3. I have been attending USFSP for (\_\_\_) years. (1 yr, 2 yrs, 3 yrs, 4+ years)
4. What range does your age fall? (age options) (17 or under, 18-19, 20-21, 22-24, 25-29, 30 or over, prefer not to respond)
5. What gender do you identify with? (male, female, transgender, self-identity [please identify], prefer not to respond)

Section 2 (Community Awareness of the Dean of Students):

(On a scale of 1-5, where 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, is used to answer the following questions)

1. I can describe my understanding of the purpose of the Office of the Dean of Students here at USFSP.
2. I can identify who the Dean of Students is here at USFSP.
3. I can identify who the staff is in the Office of the Dean of Students here at USFSP.
4. I can list and describe all of the services that are currently offered through the Office of the Dean of Students here at USFSP.

(Choose the answer that best fits your past experiences)

1. While at USFSP, have you ever been personally referred to or utilized the services from the Dean of Students? (Yes or No)
2. If you had personally been referred to or utilized the services from the Dean of Students, was that experience helpful? (Yes, No, This does not apply to me)

Section 3 (Understanding the Current Student Community):

(A scale of 1-5, where 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, is used to answer the following questions)

1. I feel proud to be a USFSP student.
2. I feel connected to the USFSP campus staff.
3. I feel connected to the USFSP campus faculty.
4. I feel connected to other USFSP students.

5. I feel connected to USFSP Campus Life.
6. I perceive our campus as a safe and caring place for USFSP students.
7. I feel comfortable communicating with staff and/or faculty about personal challenges that I may be facing.
8. If I were to see a peer engaging in any kind of unhealthy or unsafe behaviors, I would feel comfortable reporting that situation to staff and/or faculty.
9. I know how to report unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that I may see on campus.
10. Are you currently facing any of the challenges listed below?

(Please check all that may apply)

academic difficulties

financial concerns

mental health concerns

difficulties managing stress

health issues

sexual assault

11. What additional services might be of help to you here at USFSP?

(check all that apply):

advisement for financial concerns

assistance with purchasing/obtaining textbooks

tuition assistance

help seeking employment

health and wellness workshops

stress management education

help meeting and connecting with other students

help learning about the resources available to students on campus

help with how to report unsafe or unhealthy behaviors that I see

education on what unsafe and unhealthy behaviors are

education on available sexual education and services on campus