# Cultivating a Flourishing Campus
Executive Summary

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# 1      Our Vision

## Our Story

The student experience at StFX University is comprised of individual stories that shape what we believe about the university's purpose and impact. The mission to foster equitable learning and living environments in which all students can flourish represents an important motivation, but its intentions cannot outweigh the importance of understanding our place in the broader student culture and experience.

This Plan has emerged in extraordinary times. As we continue to navigate the uncertainties of a global pandemic together, we are acutely aware of the increasingly complex challenges in the day-to-day lives of our students. These challenges are portrayed in popular media, illustrated in research findings, and all too often, experienced first-hand. We are also keenly aware of students' potential for strength, resiliency, adaptability and "doing their part" for their friends and the broader community.

As our students confront the uncertainties involved in navigating our post-pandemic realities, we will help leverage their strengths and develop the knowledge and skills they need to move confidently towards their future lives and careers. At the same time, StFX does not place responsibility for wellness on the individual alone as individuals exist within contexts and systems. Therefore, this Plan recognizes the important role that our institution has in providing a supportive context in which personal agency can be developed and exercised. We will provide students with the skills to be resilient and also the opportunity to develop wholistically while they are at StFX, supported by a committed group of staff, faculty and alumni who can help them navigate post-secondary education and the world beyond. We recognize that upstream prevention must be balanced with appropriate and timely support.

To make the Student Experience story one about cultivating a flourishing campus, we can learn from storytelling to build empathy and shift culture. To create experiences that are student-centered, we must demonstrate our commitment to integrating research, theory, practice and assessment across all of the programs, resources, and supports we provide. We must be committed to understanding the impact of our work on the lives and experiences of all students, and we must make the story we want to have told about us true in every action, communication, and relationship.

## Culture & Vision

Understanding that the needs of students are varied, dynamic, and complex, this Plan takes a *whole campus approach* to cultivating a student culture and experience that supports *all students flourishing*. Our vision is for all Xaverians to discover their personalized pathway through StFX's rich, wholistic learning environment, engage in courageous conversations with our diverse community on and off campus, and develop the skills to *flourish* throughout their degree and after graduation.

This work starts with strengthening mental health supports and primary care services within Student Services. We prioritize reducing wait times; streamlining service pathways for students and employees; and improved communications around resources and services, including after-hours and off campus supports. By focusing on the first-year experience we will frontload evidence-informed resources, supports and programs that foster individual and collective student well-being. Through a commitment to empathy and collaboration, our student-centered approach to wellness will apply an intersectional lens that is adaptive to the needs of individual students and the campus community.

Moreover, taking a whole campus approach is about the whole student, recognizing the powerful link between physical health, spiritual health, emotions, behaviour, social interaction, and student academic success. It is about recognizing that mental health and well-being can fluctuate, and the focus needs to be on *flourishing* at university, understanding that mental well-being is much more than the absence of illness.

In this respect, StFX recognizes that wholistic student success and well-being cannot be totally achieved through a focus on the delivery of mental health services and supports alone. StFX is known for and prides itself on a focus on the academic and personal development of students making community and social involvement a large part of the learning experience. Thus, our campus community requires a *whole campus approach* where services, policies and environments are examined through a lens of equity, student mental health and wellness. **An integrated effort will best serve StFX students by creating a cohesive network of options that can help them flourish.** This plan will enhance StFX's current strengths in prioritizing wholistic student success by embedding equity and student well-being through the student experience.

## StFX Continuum of Care Model

To illustrate our collective approach, StFX has adopted a **Continuum of Care model** which is a flexible and comprehensive system for delivering programs, resources and services for supporting wholistic student mental health and well-being. This model helps to ensure that students have access to the care and resources they want and need, regardless of where they find themselves on the mental health continuum.

The components of the model highlight a student-centric approach, with a focus on prevention and the reduction of stigma. Students can engage with any part of the Continuum of Care, or multiple parts of the continuum at the same time. Intensity can be increased or decreased depending on the level of distress, need and readiness to engage in the process. Programs can also be selected and arranged based on need. There is no starting point of finish line – only resources and supports that deliver the right care at the right time. Together, the model supports an integrated system with the ability to effectively build and support mental health and well-being across the continuum of care.
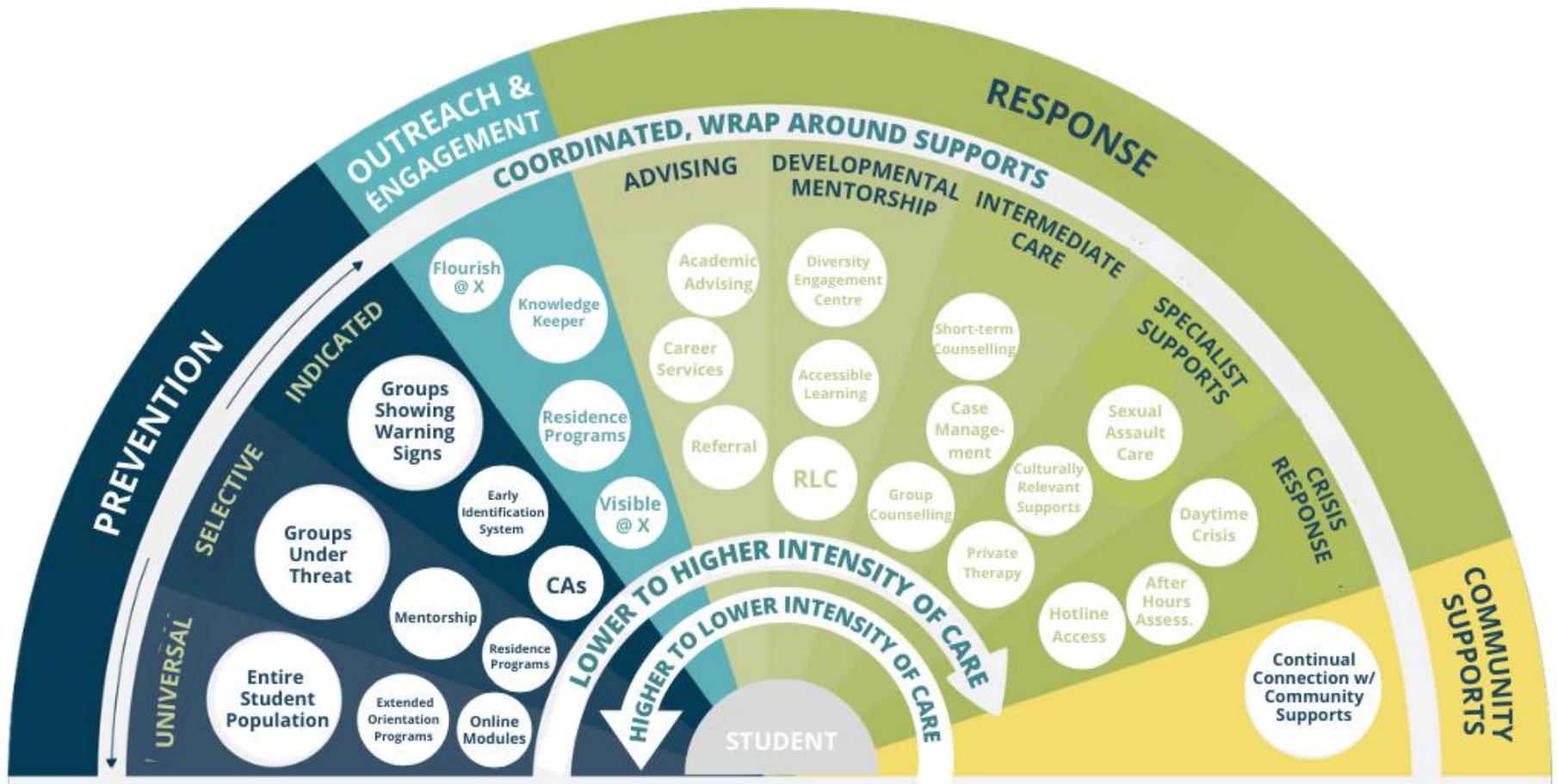
*Figure 1: StFX Continuum of Care Model*

## 2　　Our Approach

### Priority Areas

StFX is a unique environment and we are proud of what differentiates us from other post-secondary institutions. We believe in and embrace our commitment to **build a university as it is meant to be**. We also recognize that the living and learning environment at StFX has distinctive challenges and dynamics that can impact student wholistic student success and well-being.

We aspire to create the conditions for all students to feel supported and be well and to be guided to opportunities to explore and develop their strengths and talents. We have examined and researched many approaches and strategies to inform our work. We heard from students, staff and faculty that we need to prioritize mental health literacy, develop students' capacity to manage stress and develop resiliency skills, ensure ongoing communication of available resources and services, review policies and practices from an anti-racism and trauma-informed lens, and ensure that proactive support for student mental health and well-being is integrated into all facets of our university culture and experience. To achieve our vision we will build understanding, capacity and connection across the StFX community and with the external community.

| Build Understanding | Build Capacity | Build Connection |
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| We will educate students, faculty and staff about mental health issues and barriers experienced by students, and in particular students from historically-exclude groups to reduce stigma and create the motivation to engage in skill development and support change. We will ensure that StFX has an equitable and respectful culture that reflects the values of our institution, and the wellness needs of our communities. | We will create an environment where our focus on wholistic student success and well-being is apparent in our priorities, policies, practices and environment. We will strengthen our programs and services to support students in their well-being. We will create opportunities for skill development and having conversations about well-being. In doing so, we will create the conditions for those experiencing difficulty to seek and gain support before harm occurs. | By leveraging internal and external partnerships – and ensuring ongoing communication and engagement – we will seek opportunities to create meaningful connections and improve access and opportunity for students while at university and in their local communities. |

## Learning Goals

With students at the centre of our work, we understand that learning can be intentionally programmed across all of the places where students engage at StFX. By defining shared learning goals and scaffolding intentional learning experiences across the student lifecycle, we will support all students in achieving their current and lifelong academic, personal and career goals, which depending on the focus, includes undergraduate and graduate students; part-time and full-time students; mature students; international and domestic students.

Research identifies five key factors post-secondary administrators and educators can foster by maximizing the academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal development of students. These five factors are positive perspective (optimism about the future), academic determination (investment of effort to reach educational goals), engaged learning (engagement in the process of learning), social connectedness (healthy connection to others) and diverse citizenship (commitment to making a difference in the world (Schreiner, Louis and Nelson, 2020).

By taking a whole campus approach, StFX has the opportunity to intentionally support wholistic student success and well-being across all five factors. We commit to help students develop in these ways whether it be through involvement in on campus employment, as it is in volunteering for student government, or attending a program in residence. This is part of supporting the development of a *whole campus approach* to *all students flourishing* because it enables us to determine whether our programs, supports and services are supporting *wholistic* student success and well-being. Throughout our collective work, we seek to cultivate Xaverians who are distinguished by the following characteristics*:

| Learning Goal | *Characteristics* |
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| Critical Thinkers | *Students who are curious, engaged and reflective.* |
| Future-Focused Planners | *Students who are goal-oriented, motivated and self-directed.* |
| Adaptable Problem-Solvers | *Students who are hopeful, self-determined, resourceful & creative.* |
| Community-Minded | *Students who are relational, empathetic, collaborative & self-aware.* |
| Engaged Citizens | *Students who are equitable, globally aware and socially responsible.* |
| Innovative Leaders | *Students who exhibit integrity, judgement & intercultural competency.* |

*\*Student Services will continue to evolve and define these goals through discussion as we cocreate the Academic and University-wide Strategic Plans and will align with the learning goals that are articulated as outcomes of those plans.*

## 3      Our Initiatives

Our goal is to cultivate a whole campus approach to all students flourishing. We understand that to achieve this goal, we need to broaden and coordinate efforts across the university. The following three strategic initiatives identify the ways that we will work together to cultivate a flourishing campus, where we intentionally create living and learning environments that inspire, engage and enrich the whole student as they engage in their educational journey. The three initiatives are:

1) Optimize the first-year student experience
2) Strengthen mental health and wellness supports and services
3) Foster early and on-going engagement with, and recognition of, experiential learning

Achieving these initiatives will help to ensure that StFX is on track to deliver upon the priorities outlined in the Student Experience and Opportunity Plan. These initiatives will be supported by the following five priority actions:

1. **Develop an Integrated Mentorship Model:** Develop an integrated, proactive mentorship program that will support student transition by cultivating meaningful connections and enabling all students to discover their personalized pathways to success.
2. **Create an Extended Student Orientation and Transition Program**: Create an Extended Orientation and Transitions Program by frontloading resources, supports and programs in first year and intentionally scaffolding student learning and engagement as part of an immersive, learning-focused experience through all years of study.
3. **Formalize Collaborative, Wrap Around Supports**: Advance a wholistic approach to student mental health and well-being, that facilitates access to both proactive and responsive services and fosters an integrated philosophy of evident care to support wholistic student success and well-being.
4. **Create Opportunities for All Students to Participate in Meaningful Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning**: Facilitate guided learning opportunities for all students that proactively advance common learning goals across living and learning environments. Cultivate agency by engaging students in the process of discovering their strengths and personalized pathways to wholistic success and well-being.
5. **Radically Welcome and Engage Students from Historically Excluded Groups**: Radically welcome students by advancing equitable access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed programs, resources and services for students from historically excluded and equity-deserving populations. Foster belonging by creating opportunities for community and connection across diverse and intersectional identities.

| Initiative 1: | Optimize the First Year Experience |
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| Priority Area | Actions |
| Build Understanding | 1.1 Create a New Student Experience Framework that maps intentional co-curricular student engagement and learning opportunities throughout the entire first-year experience. This framework will be developed in partnership with Academics and Student Services, working together to support academic transition and wholistic student success. |
| | 1.2 Collaborate with the Students' Union, academic units and other campus and community partners to develop and deliver an evidence-informed Orientation Week Program, based in student flourishing. Identify and remove barriers to participation in Orientation Week. Integrate opportunities to learn about and share diverse cultural identities and create a welcoming community of authentic belonging. |
| | 1.3 Develop high-quality co-curricular learning experiences and transitions programming for off-campus, mature, distance learning, transfer students and student athletes that enrich their student experience. |
| | 1.4 Coordinate a Winter transitions program to welcome new students arriving in January (often these students are international students), and re-orient all first-year students to programs, services, engagement opportunities, and supports provided by StFX. |
| | 1.5 Establish an ongoing partnership between StFX Student Services, Graduate Studies and Continuing and Distance Education to enhance understanding of the specific needs of graduate and distance learning students and deepen an understanding of their transitional needs. |
| | 1.6 Develop online videos/modules for parents and supporters to be empowered to support their student in their transition to university. These same tools may be used by faculty, staff and students to understand the supports available and how to access them. |
| | 1.7 Provide proactive programming and experiential initiatives that support harm reduction approaches to substance use and provide healthy alternatives to socializing. |
| | 1.8 Leverage the "Being Xaverian" campaign as an opportunity co-create and share Xaverian community values, share stories of diverse student experiences and celebrate positive citizenship at StFX. |
| Build Capacity | 1.9 Collaborate with Academics to establish a transition year program to support student success (both pre-entrance and during first year), including formal (e.g., camps and courses) and informal supports (e.g., mentorship). Areas of focus will include the development of a Summer Bridge Program focused on academic orientation and community connection for all students, with tailored programs and engagement opportunities for historically-excluded students. This would include the ability to obtain ESL training and support for international students and other students for whom English is not their first language. |

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| | 1.10 Build capacity for the Residence Life Leadership Team, Diversity Engagement Centre, and peer leaders to frontload developmental mentorship and coaching in support of first-year transition and student success through intentional leadership development, coaching, and training opportunities. Mentors will have capacity to provide strengths-based coaching, using an equity and inclusion lens. |
| Build Connection | 1.12 Create group mentoring networks for students from historically-excluded groups to come together in community, share experiences, explore, and access academic, personal and career opportunities and pathways. This includes Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international students, new Canadians, first-generation students and students with disabilities. |
| | 1.13 Build on and promote existing mentorship networks with StFX faculty, alumni, Career Services and community networks to ensure all StFX students have opportunities to seek career mentors from a diverse network. |
| | 1.15 Create an online web platform for StFX students (undergraduate, graduate, full-time or part-time) to share their stories, guided by a content strategy based in student flourishing. |

| Initiative 2: | Strengthen Mental Health and Well-being Supports and Services |
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| Priority Area | Actions |
| Build Understanding | 2.1 Strengthen awareness around the full range of student resources available at StFX and streamline access to those resources.  Ensure students have access to information about Mental Health and Addiction Services, critical care, after hours care and resources in our local community. |
| | 2.2 Develop tools and resources to support administrative leaders, faculty, staff, and students in identifying signs and symptoms of distress or at-risk behaviours, and enable efficient and timely access to appropriate resources. |
| | 2.3 Frontload transitional supports for all students that normalize help seeking behaviours and increase awareness about the resources available. Incorporate mental health and wellness literacy, development of resiliency, coping and stress management skills, and awareness of campus supports and services within Orientation and Extended Orientation programming; build into graduate student orientations, varsity sport teams' training, etc. |

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| | 2.4 Create and maintain student-facing wellness programming designed to capture, learn and understand diverse student experiences. Use a variety of assessment strategies to develop and adapt programs, services and resources to meet the needs of both specific and broad intersectional student identities, including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQIA+, international students, graduate students, mature students, and students with disabilities |
| Build Capacity | 2.5 Create evidence informed frameworks that support our Residence Education programming, Alcohol and Substance Use Strategy and Mental Health & Wellness initiatives, ensuring that our programs are sensitive to diverse student experiences. |
| | 2.6 Provide proactive and timely programs, services and resources that focus on the social determinants of health at all points along the mental health continuum (from mental well-being to urgent crisis). Make changes to how mental health services and supports are structured to match how students are accessing information and services. We prioritize reducing wait times; streamlining service pathways and follow-up for students, faculty and staff; and improved communications around resources and services. |
| | 2.7 Streamline access to culturally relevant, trauma-informed supports and services available to students who have experienced acts of racism, harassment and/or discrimination. This will include reviewing policies, processes and procedures within StFX that may unintentionally discriminate, and revise policies to better enable equity, diversity and accessibility. New policies and procedures will include but will not be limited to: Return to Campus Following Hospitalization procedures, Accommodations Policy for Episodic and Non-Permanent Injury or Illness, and Employment Equity Policy. |
| | 2.8 Continue to expand and diversify culturally-relevant resources, services and supports for students from historically-excluded groups, including Indigenous, Black and international students. Continue to strengthen relationships with Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian communities and dedicated service providers to improve access to culturally-relevant resources for our students. |
| | 2.9 Expand support model for students with disabilities (including temporary or episodic) to incorporate a *whole student approach* through mentoring, case management, outreach and engagement. |
| | 2.10 Implement a case management model to support students of concern. This may include students with mental illnesses or students who may be experiencing mental distress, who are in academic difficulty or may be heading toward or experiencing a crisis. Case Management supports students who have complex or multifaceted situations requiring a coordinated response. |

| Build Connection | 2.11 Partner with faculty experts on campus to build our knowledge and innovate our programming based on evidence-informed practices and cutting-edge research. We will start by focusing our partnerships on three areas: Student Mental Health; Alcohol and Substance Use; and Residence Education. |
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| | 2.12 Identify and streamline pathways to care to support early identification, self-care, and help-seeking by putting students in contact with the appropriate resources at the appropriate time. |
| | 2.13 Convene regular CARE Team meetings to formalize a coordinated, wrap around support model between faculty, academic units, and student services with systems and policies to facilitate communication and foster integrated and student-centric supports. The CARE Team responds to reports about students experiencing difficulties or whose behaviour is raising concerns within the university community. |
| | 2.14 Expand collaborative partnerships between StFX and health care agencies and community resources to systematize a coordinated approach to supporting wholistic student success and well-being. |

| Initiative 3: | Foster early and on-going engagement with, and recognition of, Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning |
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| Priority Area | Actions |
| Build Understanding | 3.1 Develop an integrated Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning framework to scaffold intentional student learning and engagement opportunities through all programs and years of study. |
| | 3.2 Embed equity, anti-racism and accessibility in the development and execution of special student-facing events, and programming (Extended Orientation Programming, Homecoming, etc.) to be representative of diverse lived experiences and identities present in our university community. |
| Build Capacity | 3.3 Build clear structures, pathways and supports to more easily enable all students to engage through existing mechanisms such as Nova Scotia Works Career Connections, Service Learning, McKenna Leadership Programs, Student/Career Services and Programming, etc. |
| | 3.4 Strengthen off-campus student housing options, with a particular focus on facilitating off-campus accommodations for international students, in partnership with the Landlord's Association and Town of Antigonish. This could include support for initiatives such as education about tenant rights and responsibilities, promotion of off-campus housing options, income tax support, and At Home in Antigonish for the Holidays program. |
| | 3.5 Develop targeted co-curricular programming and engagement opportunities for students with disabilities, with a focus on university transition, career transition and self-determination. |

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| | 3.6 Scaffold comprehensive training for students in leadership and peer support roles, varsity sport, learning abroad/exchange, etc. that they commit to, and enact, in their roles in our community. Content will be tailored for each role, with a consistent focus on teaching anti-racism and decolonization, anti-discrimination, cultural competency/safety, equity, gender-based and sexual violence, mental health literacy/anti-stigma, resiliency and coping skills, and accessibility. |
| | 3.7 Collaborate with Academic to secure external financial support and subject-matter expertise to establish new experiential learning opportunities and related employment skills development programming, with a focus on students from historically-excluded groups. This would enable students to obtain experience in meaningful career related roles that develop their professional skills before graduation. |
| | 3.8 Commit to equitable and inclusive recruitment, hiring, onboarding, retention and offboarding practices that increase the diversity among our student staff complements, in particular representation from Indigenous, Black, minoritized communities and students with disabilities. |
| | 3.9 Strengthen capacity of on-campus and off-campus employers to create culturally-relevant, trauma-informed and supportive workplaces. |
| Build Connection | 3.10 In collaboration with Academic, Students' Union and other campus providers, develop a digital Experiential Learning Catalogue/Co-Curricular Record (CCR) as a tool to help students thoughtfully select co-curricular engagement opportunities, integrate their campus experiences, communicate the development of skills, and reflect on their development in the areas of meaning and purpose. |
| | 3.11 Cultivate signature spaces and events on campus that engage alumni, the Antigonish community, students, faculty and staff in spirited and sanctioned events that inspire a sense of connection and safe and healthy opportunities to engage (ex. Extended Orientation, Homecoming, approaches for higher risk times and substance use). Continue to build upon the Being Xaverian Good Neighbours Strategy to foster positive citizenship and stronger town-gown relations. |
| | 3.12 Maintain the Student Accessibility Advisory Committee to provide leadership opportunities for students with disabilities and ensure that their voices and lived experiences are reflected in program and service design, development and delivery. |

| | 3.13 Establish strategic partnerships and collaborations with the Town of Antigonish and County partners to create a welcoming, equitable and accessible community environment for all StFX students, with a particular focus on facilitating community engagement and connection for students from historically-excluded groups. This will involve collaborating on shared community projects, professional development, strengthening town-gown relations, and continuing to listen and learn from diverse student experiences. |
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