

To: StFX University Community
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Subject: StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan – Updates

StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan Strategic Planning Updates

Executive Summary

Over the past year, the StFX Senate Quality of Life Committee has been engaging in a comprehensive community engagement process to inform the development of the new StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan (2022-2027). The purpose of the Plan is to promote continuous improvement and excellence in the delivery of student programs, supports and services. This is an opportunity to set priorities and establish measurable goals that will set StFX apart from other universities, based on the wholistic student experience we provide.

This memo provides an update to the university community on the strategic planning process to date, and a summary of the emerging themes and preliminary responses that are driving our strategic priorities and directions. As part of our ongoing, iterative strategic planning process, we invite additional feedback via the [Student Experience and Opportunity Plan website](#) as well as a series of Town Hall sessions, which will be held in Spring 2022. Further information about our next steps is provided in this summary.

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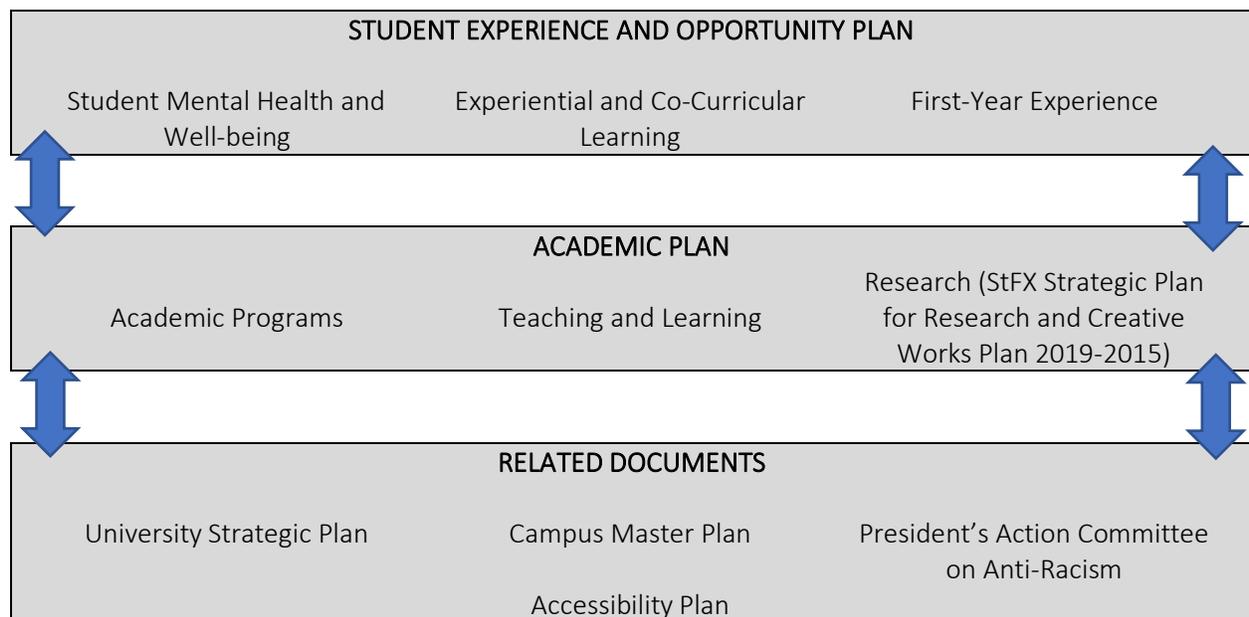
1 Our Process



Strategic Planning Framework and Alignment

While we are producing the new Student Experience and Opportunity Plan, StFX is simultaneously working on the renewal of our University Strategic Plan (2017-2022) as well as the development of the StFX Academic Plan (2017-2022) and other comprehensive strategic planning initiatives, including the President’s Action Committee on Anti-Racism and the development of the StFX Accessibility Plan.

As part of our strategic planning process, we have prioritized the need to demonstrate alignment between these documents. By building on this foundation and ensuring alignment between our priorities and directions, StFX will continue to deliver innovative learning and engagement opportunities through all of the programs, services, supports and initiatives we provide.



Evidence-Informed Research and Practice

The StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is informed by a combination of research and best practices in student affairs, as well as the valuable ideas, input and experiences shared by students, faculty and staff through campus-wide consultation and engagement.

An emerging vision of the StFX Student Experience is an institutional environment of people, places and spaces that **empower all students flourishing**. We live this vision by building understanding, capacity and connection. We integrate research, theory, practice and continuous improvement across all of the programs, resources, and supports we provide.

We know from a substantial body of literature, that students who *flourish* do better in all areas of their lives: they have enriched careers; they have deeper and more meaningful connections with peers, colleagues and community; they go on to make more meaningful contributions in both community and career; and they have more agility in the way in which they respond to set-backs, learning to become courageous in the face of discomfort, without fear of failure.

The development of the StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is grounded in contemporary and well-established frameworks in student *flourishing*. This theory and practice model will allow us to be informed by best practices in the field. All programs, resources and supports provided by StFX Student Services will be intentionally designed and grounded in the following evidence-informed frameworks to support wholistic student success and well-being:

- Cultivate a Flourishing Campus
- Support Mental Health as a Continuum
- Recognize and Respond to Social Determinants of Health
- Promote Agency through Wholistic Student Engagement
- Harness a Developmental and Proactive Approach

The learning experiences and wellbeing of students is significantly impacted by interrelated physical, cultural, spiritual, political, socio-economic, and organizational contextual factors (Silverman, Underhile, & Keeling, 2008). Building on the social determinants, our approach to supporting students is one that recognizes intersectionality—the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals and groups.

StFX is committed to providing space for ALL students to flourish. To do that well, we must adopt a university-wide strategic plan that not only responds to individual concerns but also makes student well-being a priority in all that we do. To achieve our objectives, we need a coordinated, collaborative approach across the university that focuses on our strengths and gives all of us the opportunity to be leaders and champions for student success and well-being. This will ensure the future of StFX is one where student well-being is prioritized, understood, and embraced by all.

Engaging the Campus Community

The Student Experience at StFX University is a complex range of individual experiences that shape what we believe about the university's purpose and impact. To shape the future of the student experience and understand the key drivers that constitute the quality of life for StFX students, we have engaged the campus community in a series of consultations that have included multiple opportunities for all members of the StFX campus community to engage, including:

- Online Forum, hosted via stfx.moodle.ca (available 24/7)
- Joint Consultations: Academic Plan + Student Experience and Opportunity Plan
- Community Conversations with Historically Excluded Groups
- Targeted Consultation Sessions (ex. Student Athletes, residence student leadership team, etc.)
- One-on-one meetings
- StFX University Senate & StFX Leadership Council
- Email: StudentExperiencePlan@stfx.ca

Through individual team meetings, focus groups, campus-wide consultations and written submissions, we have received more than 617 inputs from campus community members. The response has been enthusiastic, revealing a tremendous sense of optimism about our work.

It is important to note that the consultation process may not be representative of all voices, experiences and perspectives. The next phases of our strategic planning process will focus on re-engaging the campus community around some specific priority actions that have emerged through our consultation process to date. Continuing to seek input from our community will remain important as part of our iterative planning process to ensure that we are gathering a diverse representation of voices, experiences and perspectives.

2 What We Learned

Emerging Themes

While the intent of this consultation process was to solicit input to inform the development of the new StFX Student Experience and Opportunity Plan, the feedback received can inform student-focused supports and enrichment initiatives across StFX.

The feedback urges StFX to build upon the strengths of our current student services model to adopt a wholistic student affairs approach that enhances existing programs, supports and services. Core to this philosophical shift must be a commitment to adopt equity, inclusion and accessibility lenses in the design, implementation and assessment of programs, services and co-curricular learning experiences.

With regard to units like Health and Counselling, Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning, Diversity Engagement Centre and Student Life (including Residence Life), participants suggested that this could include enhancements such as reviewing policies, practices and procedures through an equity, trauma-informed lens; providing tailored resources, programs and engagement opportunities for historically-excluded students (including Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQ+, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities); and broadening existing programs and services to

support an expanded audience (e.g. students living off-campus, student athletes, mature students, and distance learning students).

The diverse feedback we gathered converges around several themes:

- Embed equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, Truth and Reconciliation, and accessibility throughout our culture, environment, policies, programs, practices and services.
- Foster a positive campus culture with healthy community connections built on empathy, civility, mutual respect and authentic relationships.
- Cultivate a flourishing campus environment that supports wholistic student mental health and well-being.
- Extend summer transition, orientation, and co-curricular programming with activities and events that promote student engagement and success.
- Offer every student guided opportunities to engage in community service, internships and other forms of experiential learning.
- Develop and facilitate environments where domestic and international students can learn and connect across experiences and cultures.
- Empower our campus community by enhancing pathways and communications around student engagement opportunities, resources and services.

These findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive, whole campus approach to support wholistic student success and well-being. As the feedback made clear, we need to invest in cultivating living and learning environments that are intentionally designed to ensure *all students flourish*.

Areas of Focus

To mobilize action across specific areas pertaining to the student experience at StFX, the StFX Senate Quality of Life Committee focused the campus-wide consultation process on three areas of focus.

Mental Health and Well-being	Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning	First-Year Experience
By taking a whole campus approach to mental health and well-being, students feel supported in their personal and academic journey through accessible programs and services that promote, inspire and foster their ability to flourish.	Students will be able to plan and access experiential and cocurricular learning and can articulate the knowledge they acquire through academic and non-academic engagement; learning that expands their adaptability for the future of work, skills that empower them to define their unique pathway for individual success, and values that demonstrate social responsibility.	All first-year students have access to resources, programs, initiatives and guided opportunities that support meaningful and authentic campus connections, which build the foundation for their personal success and continued academic achievement

Summary of Recommendations

Through our consultations to date, we have collected feedback and recommendations across these three areas. Collectively, the recommendations are grouped into thematic categories:

Student Mental Health and Well-being

- Theme #1: Review Policies, Programs and Procedures to Ensure they Support Wholistic Student Success
- Theme #2: Build Understanding and Awareness through Consistent Health Promotion and Engagement
- Theme #3: Create Targeted Prevention and Early Identification Processes
- Theme #4: Integrate Service Access and Delivery as part of a Multi-Tier Student Support Model
- Theme #5: Address the Prevalence and Frequency of Alcohol and Substance Use
- Theme #6: Provide Access to Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Resources, Supports and Services
- Theme #7: Advance Accessible Engagement Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
- Theme #8: Coordinate Student Supports and Services for Individuals with Complex Needs
- Theme #9: Formalize Campus and Community Partnerships and Collaborations

Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning

- Theme #1: Expand and Diversify Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning Opportunities
- Theme #2: Intentionally Design and Scaffold Student Learning and Engagement
- Theme #3: Align Curricular and Co-Curricular Learning Goals and Experiences
- Theme #4: Track and Ensure Access to High Quality Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning Opportunities
- Theme #5: Develop a University 101 Transitions Program
- Theme #6: Expand Capacity and Reduce Barriers to Participation
- Theme #7: Create Intentional Experiences Designed to Engage Historically-Excluded Students
- Theme #8: Embed a Strengths-based Approach to Assessment (Understanding Our Impact)

First-Year Experience

- Theme #1: Foster Sense of Community and Sense of Connection
- Theme #2: Frontload Student Supports and Build Capacity for Early Identification & Intervention
- Theme #3: Deliver an Evidence-Informed Student Orientation
- Theme #4: Extend Student Transition Programming throughout the First Year Experience
- Theme #5: Radically Welcome Students through Intentional Programs & Experiences
- Theme #6: Advance EDI-A in Student Leadership and Engagement
- Theme #7: Advance Student Transition, Leadership and Enrichment (Integrated Mentorship Program)
- Theme #8: Enhance Communication, Coordination and Consistency

3 Preliminary Strategic Responses

A critical output of the new Student Experience and Opportunity Plan is the development of three strategic frameworks that will allow our portfolio to adopt a dynamic integrated student learning paradigm. The three strategic frameworks are: *Mental Health and Well-being Framework*, *Experiential and Co-Curricular Learning Framework*, *First-Year Experience Framework*.

Because of their overarching themes, each strategic framework will adopt a *whole campus approach*. Within these frameworks, student learning will permeate the boundaries of the classroom and will be deepened through all of the programs, resources and supports provided by StFX. The development of the strategic frameworks will be ongoing and collaborative. Collectively, they will be necessary to support the development and implementation of the recommendations that have emerged through our strategic planning process.

Implementation of all the frameworks will take time and will require collaboration with campus-wide stakeholders. In order to make immediate progress towards achieving several recommendations, the following emerged as *priority actions* that could enhance our ability to support student success and flourishing across multiple areas of focus:

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 that recognizes everyone within the StFX community has a role to play in supporting 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.
6. *Enrich the Residence Program as Part of Enhancing the First-Year Experience*: All first-year residence students have access to resources, programs and initiatives that support meaningful

and authentic campus connections, which build the foundation for their personal success and continued academic achievement.

As part of our ongoing, iterative planning process, we intend to re-engage the campus community in critical conversations about how each of these actions could be developed or expanded in the StFX context to achieve multiple goals. This will include engaging the campus community in Town Hall Sessions in Spring 2022. To inform and help guide the conversation (as well as next steps), we are in the process of developing a series of discussion papers (related to each priority action), which will be posted and circulated in advance of the Town Hall sessions.

As part of ensuring strategic alignment with the StFX Academic Plan and other planning initiatives, it is also important to note that these priority actions will continue to be developed, delivered and reviewed in partnership with StFX Academics and other campus stakeholders. In this way, we will ensure that our priority actions will be complementary and mutually reinforcing across all areas of student life and learning.

4 Next Steps

- Gather feedback on the emerging themes and preliminary responses via the [Student Experience and Opportunity Plan webpage](#)
- Series of Town Hall Sessions (hosted in spring 2022)
- Continue research into evidence-based approaches to articulate collective learning goals for students and approaches to align with the learning outcomes identified in the evolving StFX Academic Plan.
- Develop an Implementation Matrix, to identify priority actions and determine resource allocation.
- Build stronger relationships and connections with supportive colleagues across the university to champion this approach and collective work across the institution.

5 Cultivating a Flourishing Campus Together

Student success is not defined by academic performance and grades alone. An equitable, flourishing campus builds a culture where students know they matter, that they belong and that StFX is a place they can flourish. This goal cannot be achieved through the work of one area alone. It will require a coordinated campus-wide effort that engages partners in systemic change as we examine all areas of our institution from academic policies and practices, to our student services model to the built environment.

This is important work. The StFX Senate Quality of Life Committee looks forward to continuing to collaborate with faculty, staff, administrative leaders and students as we continue to move forward.