

# OUR UNIVERSITY (OU)'S VIRTUAL CAMPUS PLATFORM:

STUDENT AFFAIRS CASE STUDY COMPETITION



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# OUTLINE OF THE VCP

Our University (OU) was in-person before COVID-19 but has been virtual for students since August 2020. To promote social and community engagement during this difficult time, we created the Virtual Campus Platform (VCP). OU's VCP is a platform where students, faculty, and staff can all experience their campus engagement virtually. Each campus community member receives a unique university login and credentials, customizes a Yourmoji, and shows up live as their Yourmoji as they physically navigate the platform. Campus offices (like the Identity Center and Student Union) have live operating student employees and full-time staffers (also showing as their Yourmoji) that virtually provide the services and support they would on a physical campus via instant chat, voice, and video conferencing features. The platform integrates student support service staff, faculty, student employees, and administration all in one lively, virtual space. Campus events, meetings, and programming initiatives all exist within the platform.

## OUTLINE OF THE VCP CONT.

- Students are able to enter the location of their choosing and engage with campus community members in each space. Users can text-chat, voice-chat, and video-chat through features enabled on VCP.
- VCP features a Student Union, a Student Organization Tower, a Recreation and Wellness Center, Academic Hubs, a Library, an Identity Center, Dining Learning Communities (DLCs), and open spaces across campus for students to sit and engage with one another (like benches and tables).
- Each user can personalize their profile and character based on their identities, interests, and unique gender expression.
- Some spaces have restrictions based on employment status, like staff lounges in the Student Union or student employee-specific spaces (e.g. behind the information desk in the Student Union). Some spaces, like the Student Organization Tower, are student-only.
- A well-designed training on the platform is necessary for all students, faculty, and staff.

## OUTLINE OF THE VCP CONT.

- To promote student wellness and limit screen time, there are scheduled “blackout” times where the platform will be offline (between 1:00 AM and 6:00 AM each night). Additionally, virtual building hours will reflect those of usual physical building hours (for example, the Student Union would remain open later than other staffed centers and hubs, and campus buildings will close at the same times they regularly would on a physical campus).
- In the virtual entrance of each building, a bulletin board of current and upcoming events is featured for students alongside an explicit explanation of what to expect from each space. An example of the latter type of bulletin board is on the next slide.

# EXAMPLE OF ONE SCREEN INSIDE ENTRANCE OF VCP SPACES

The background of the slide features a photograph of a silver laptop on the left, with its keyboard visible. To the right of the laptop are several books and folders standing upright. One folder is light blue with a white floral pattern. The books have various colored spines, including brown, grey, and blue. The entire scene is set against a plain white background.

## ACADEMIC HUB

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"In the Academic Hubs, you can expect to find individual hubs for each academic year (e.g. a first-year hub, sophomore hub, etc.) including a hub for graduate students. In these hubs, you find open spaces where students gather and can casually meet, congregate, and work alongside other students in their class. This can be seen as a vibrant study space. You'll also find an "Office Hour" hub in this space where faculty across campus come to offer space for students to ask questions, work on difficult assignments, receive feedback on progress and student work, and meet one-on-one to simply get to know their faculty. Faculty post their office hours on their syllabi. Finally, classes are held in this Space. Light music is played in each of the spaces excluding the Office Hour Hub and classrooms."

## GOALS OF OU'S VIRTUAL CAMPUS

1. To engage students as partners in co-constructing their learning in college
2. To promote social and community engagement among students, student groups, faculty, and administrators
3. To advance equity and social justice by grounding our program in critical and poststructural frameworks for student development and conducting frequent and ongoing program evaluation

# DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR OU'S VCP

1. **Social and community engagement:** First year students will frequently engage with at least one student community, friend, or faculty member that gives them a sense of belonging on “campus.”
2. **Integration:** The student experience on “campus” will traverse disciplines, student affairs, and academic affairs. Faculty, staff, and students will all operate consistently on the platform.
3. **Advancing agency:** Students will develop the autonomy to co-create their engagement on campus and foster a sense of meaning-making in their experiences.
4. **Reducing barriers:** Students will have increased access to equitable programs that address the needs of historically marginalized students through a critical theoretical framework and student needs assessment.

# GOALS

1. To engage students as partners in co-constructing their learning in college
2. To promote social and community engagement among students, student groups, faculty, and administrators
3. To advance equity and social justice by grounding our program in critical and poststructural student development theory and conducting frequent and ongoing program evaluation

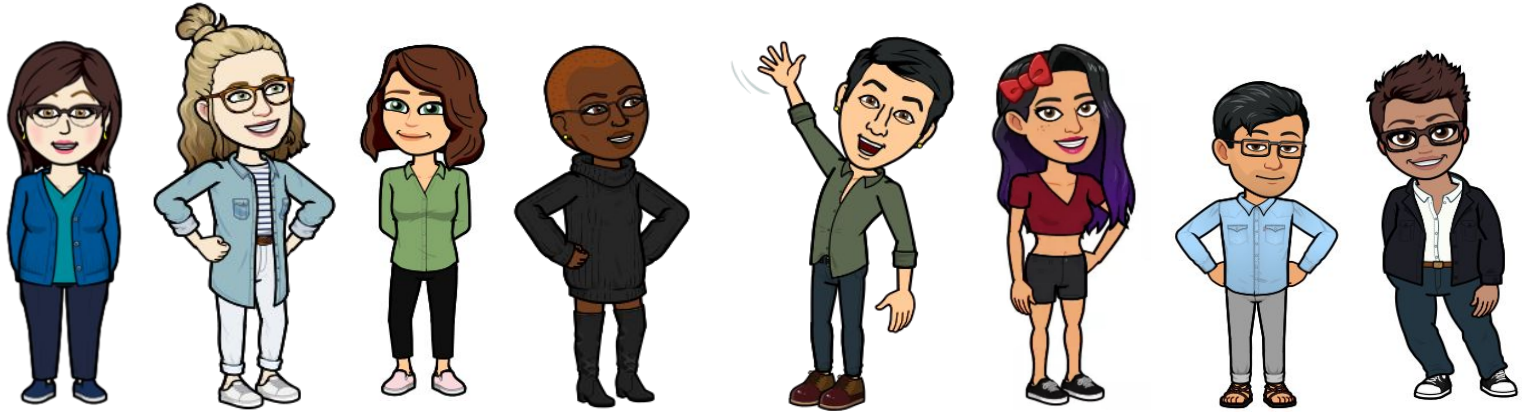
# OUTCOMES

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# YOURMOJIS

Yourmojis are customizable virtual stand-ins for each campus community member. This is the avatar that campus community members will use to physically navigate campus, sit down in study spaces and other spaces, and engage with other Yourmojis. When community members come close enough to one another, an automatic chat function appears. Voice and video functions are also always available for personal chatting.



# EXAMPLE OF HOW TO DESIGN YOUR YOURMOJI



Appearance



Outfit



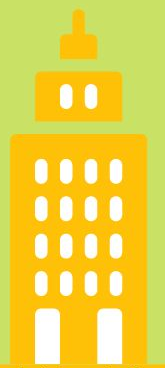
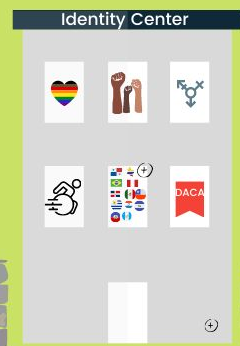
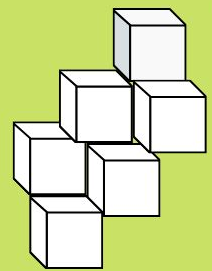
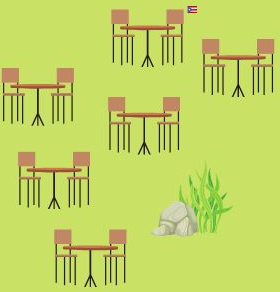
More Choices



Nelson

Design your Avatar

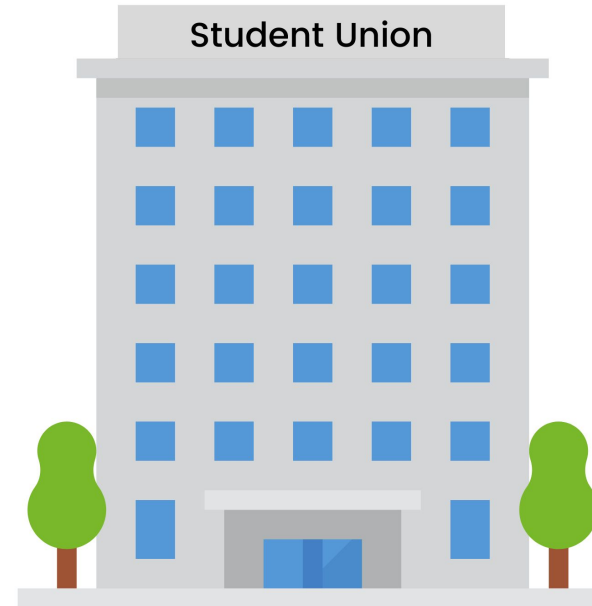




# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## The Student Union:

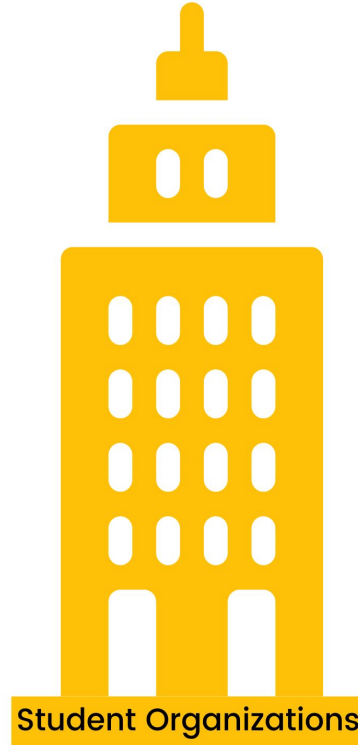
- Event spaces and services
- Study spaces
- Open social hub
- Student life programming
- Staff and student employees facilitating events, supporting students, and managing and building operations



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## The Student Org Tower:

- Run by student organizations
- Open social space for student org members to engage with one another
- Organization-specific spaces
- Fraternity and Sorority life activities



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## Academic Hubs:

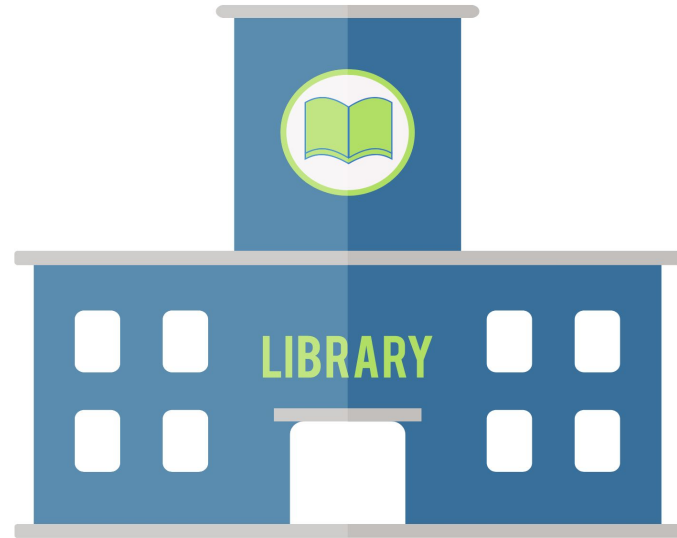
- Classes
- Individual hubs for each class year
- Faculty office hours
- Academic advising
- Tutoring services
- Writing Center



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## The Library:

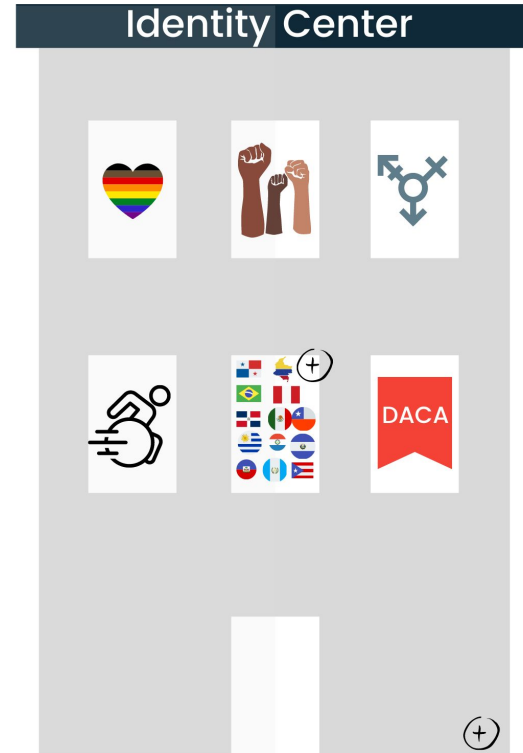
- Study rooms are available for reservation
- Students can virtually access their (virtual) campus library
- Additional resources for research, presentations, and writing
- Library staff



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## The Identity Center:

- Hubs specific to LGBTQIA+, gender, race, and ethnic identities staffed with university administrators
- Additional hubs can be created (and student-run) for intersecting and/or identities not already presented in the center
- Staff as a source during office hours. After hours, students can utilize this space for community building.





# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## The Recreation and Wellness Center:

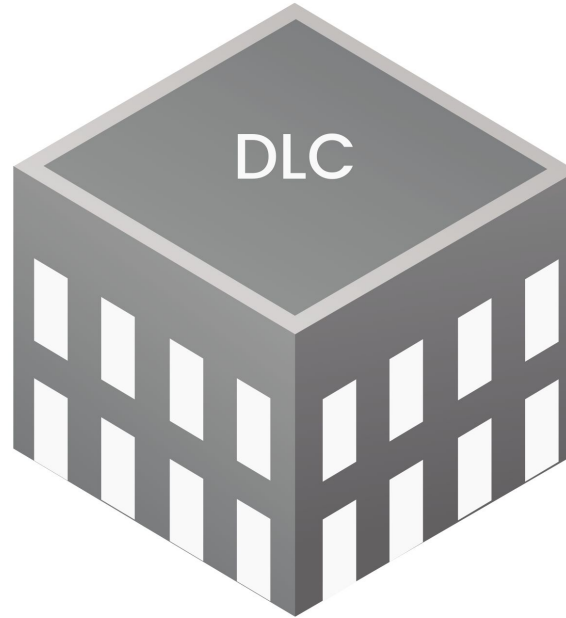
- Group exercise classes and personal training sessions are hosted from this space
- Wellness events/activities (DIY, meditation, etc.)
- Students can connect with the counseling center for individual and group telehealth services



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## Dining Learning Communities:

- Eat with peers virtually via video or voice chat
- Students will determine our two DLC topic areas through needs assessment
- Community programming & lunches/dinners



# HIGHLIGHTED FEATURES

## Promotional Cubes:

- The cubes will display digital advertisements for campus events and student organization programming. When a campus community member clicks on one side of the cube, the platform will zoom in to the advertisement displayed on that cube. Student organizations can rent this digital space through student staff in the Union.



# CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDENT DEV. THEORY

**Social Construction of Identities:** The VCP removes physical barriers that discourages students from visiting spaces and communities related to identities that they may not yet understand and/or that have been marginalized. For example, the Lavender Circle which connects LGBTQIA+ students, is able to be accessed in a manner that honors students' agency and promotes engagement at their own pace. This fosters students' identity development in community while promoting exploration, understanding, and celebration of their own identities and those of their peers.

**Agency & Authenticity:** Critical frameworks for these student concepts explain that authenticity and agency are not static, achievable developmental processes. Instead, authenticity is contextual and constantly negotiated depending on the space and student identities (Kupo & Oxendine, 2019). Embodied agency, through a Black feminist lens, is "an existential practice, a series of decisions in and against the very voice, body, mind, and spirit in ways that allow the individual or group to act upon the world and give meaning to it" (Okello & White, 2019, p.155). VCP prioritizes the unrestricted expression, freedom, and creativity for all students.

**Critical Race Theory:** This critical framework asserts that racism is endemic and names whiteness as property to use, enjoy, and exclude (Harris & Poon, 2019). We utilized this framework by intentionally being thoughtful about eliminating "whiteness as property." Everyone has the right to use and enjoy the offerings of VCP, and we've done our part to limit giving unfair advantages to white students.

**Intersectionality:** Critical frameworks of intersectionality posit that multiple systems of oppression have additive, compound effects for students with multiple marginalized identities (Wijeyesinghe, 2019). We offer the Identity Center to acknowledge identity intersections and diverse identity contributions to our campus space. Through intersectionality, we know that student identities do not exist in silos and provide support through the various campus spaces (i.e. DLCs, the Student Org tower) to affirm all of the identities students bring to the table.

**TribalCrit:** TribalCrit focuses on decolonizing higher education through relationality, reciprocity, relevance, respect, and allowing for self-determination. We used this framework to inform the conceptualization of VCP, including the use of collectively-agreed on Community Standards that are meant to foster community, safety, and community resilience (Garcia, 2018; Reyes & Tauala, 2019).

## 2ND WAVE THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

- **Self-Authorship:** The VCP promotes self-authorship as described by Baxter-Magolda (2008) as students have power to explore and discern intrapersonal identity and interpersonal mutuality. By using agency in designing their Yourmoji, students, faculty, and staff are able to dive deeper into reflecting on “who am I?” The increased ability to socialize and interact with peers and faculty/staff on VCP allows for students to navigate the ways in which they construct relationships authentically and mutually.
- **Racial/Ethnic Identity Development:** The platform provides various sustainable spaces for students to explore and develop their racial/ethnic identities. Spaces like the Identity Center or the Student Org Tower afford students opportunities to connect with their peers and staff as they examine, search, and develop their racial/ethnic identities (Phinney, 1990). For example, engaging in Latinx spaces and communities allows Latinx-identifying students to navigate varying degrees of acculturation and ethnic identity, as offered through Torres’ model of Bicultural Orientation and Latinx Identity Development (1993; 2003).

## OTHER THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

- **High Impact Practices & Tinto’s Retention/Departure Theory:** Tinto’s theory of student retention/departure and Kuh’s research on high impact practices (HIPs) both emphasize the need for academic and social integration (Kuh, 2017; Tinto, 1988). VCP integrates out-of-classroom experiences with in-classroom experience and incorporates community engagement that connects academic and student affairs. Additionally, high impact practices done well include ongoing reflection -- this is attained through the biweekly town halls and various assessments.
- **Student Partnerships:** Engaging students as partners in their learning is crucial to recognizing their lived experiences as worthy contributors to the learning environment, helping students make meaning of their own experience, and promoting student agency (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

# ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

For the purposes of continuous quality improvement and to ensure a student-centered community, we will gather qualitative and quantitative data through ongoing and frequent assessment including:

- Needs assessment focus groups
- Satisfaction surveys
- Student/faculty/ staff feedback for program evaluation
- Usage assessment of student, faculty, and staff VCP use
- Biweekly community town halls to obtain continuous and relevant feedback on VCP and Community Standards

A small team of staff will be dedicated specifically to carrying out these assessments.

# EQUITY AND ACCESS

- **Increased access to education:** On VCP, there are more opportunities for and increased access to identity-affirming spaces. Additionally, the web-based design provides increased access for nontraditional students, commuter students, and other nontraditional populations.
- **Supporting first generation college students:** VCP makes college norms plain and simple. The screens that share information about each space make explicit what has been “hidden” in the curriculum of college-going for students who have more experience with college (whether through their parents, high schools, or other resources) (Jack, 2019).
- **Student & faculty partnerships made easier:** Meeting new faculty and forming genuine relationships is made easier and more equitable on VCP, as introverted students, students with anxiety, and other student populations are able to use their Yourmojis to do the talking (via chat).
- **Community standards & frequent assessment:** Community standards allow buy-in from all community members (i.e. shared power), and frequent assessment and integration of feedback cultivates accountability. Institutional accountability and shared power are two important pieces of advancing frameworks that decolonize higher education.
- **Freedom of expression through Yourmoji:** Gender expansive students, faculty, and staff are able to take agency over their gender expression with very few limitations

# PROMOTION AND MARKETING

Our promotion and marketing plan is grounded in collaborative, reciprocal, and interdisciplinary relationships across campus. Since social involvement and engaged learning are intertwined, this platform will be intentionally and effectively interwoven into the fabric of the institution so as to become a more equitable feature for the future, past the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Admissions Welcome Packets:** VCU login information will be given to first year students in their admissions packet -- so the earliest contact they have with the university. As a part of their admissions checklist, they will need to activate and individualize their Yourmoji and complete online trainings on platform technology use and community standards on VCP.
- **Orientation & First Year Seminars:** Since most university orientations are currently virtual due to COVID-19, first-year orientation will occur on VCP, where students will be introduced for the first time. A first year seminar at OU will also teach students how to navigate the technology.
- **Email blast to students:** Promotional materials will be sent via email to each student.
- **Buy-in from campus partners:** As the platform is necessary for everyone (whether for teaching faculty to hold classes or staff to meet with students), we hope to have faculty and staff promote use of the platform for social and community engagement.
- **Social media:** Our University will promote VCU's video on all of their social media pages



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