Malta's Traditions:
An Approach to Online Social Engagement

StudentAffairs.com Case Study: University of Missouri
Edwin Davis (Team Leader), Brittany Pomilee & Sayamaa Dangaasuren

Committee Introductions

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Message from the Committee

The committee recognizes that the traditional approach for a program proposal involves laying out a theoretical framework prior to introducing your program or initiative.

Due to the complexity of our program, "Malta's Traditions", the committee has chosen to take an unconventional approach by providing an overview of the program first and then introducing the conceptual framework of choice. This will provide clarity in terms of our application of theory to practice.

Brittany Pomilee
(She/Her)

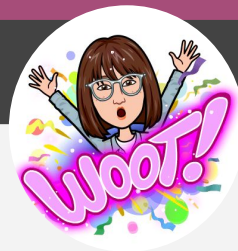Sayamaa Dangaasuren
(She/Her)

Edwin Davis
(He/Him)

Brittany Pomilee (She/Her)

Third-Year Student at UofM
Biology (Pre-Med) major and
Orientation Leader

Each programmatic committee at UofM includes a student. Our student committee member is Brittany Pomilee, a third-year undergraduate student at UofM who is pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Biology (Pre-Medicine). She also serves as an Orientation Leader on campus, making her student voice a valuable contribution to the committee's intention to support first-year undergraduate students.

Sayamaa Dangaasuren is the Director of Online Learning within the Division of Academic Affairs. Her experience with virtual engagement will be beneficial to the program we hope to implement because it requires an expertise in online education, an aspect of our theoretical framework. She graduated from the University of Malta in 2005.

Sayamaa Dangaasuren (She/Her)

Director of Online Learning
Division of Academic Affairs
UofM Alumna- Class of 2005

Edwin Davis (He/Him)

Assistant Director of Campus Activities
Division of Student Affairs

Edwin Davis is the Assistant Director of Campus Activities within the Division of Student Affairs. He is also our Committee Chairman and a strong advocate for student engagement. With his innovative programmatic skillset, this program will create a strong sense of belonging among first-year students at UofM.

Institutional Profile

Mascot: Zeus the Maltese

University of Malta (UofM): Home of the Maltese

- Public land-grant institution in the midwest
- Founded in 1874
- 10,000 undergraduate (2,500 first-year students)
- 5,000 graduate

Impact of COVID-19

- Hybrid learning model
- 85% Residential
- 15% Off-Campus and/or Exclusively Virtual

Fun Facts

- 9 Campus Traditions
- Colors: Purple and Gray
- University Seminar Groups

The University of Malta Traditions

1. Wear Purple and Gray on Fridays
2. Attend/Watch the Homecoming Game
3. "Touch" the Bell
4. Plant the Flag
5. Take Zeus for a "Walk"
6. Study Under Zeus's Tree
7. Chant the Maltese Fight Song on the Quad
8. Maltese Service Walk
9. Get Involved

The University of Malta Traditions

1. **Wear Purple and Gray on Fridays**
2. **Attend/Watch the Homecoming Game**
3. **"Touch" the Bell-** Since campus is hybrid (in-person/virtual) this year, a virtual Zoom background has been created for students to still engage with the university landmark.
4. **Plant the Flag-** All first-year students are sent a UofM flag upon admission into the institution. It is encouraged to "post" your flag in your residential living space to share your Maltese Pride.
5. **Take Zeus for a "Walk"-** Students can pick up a Flat Zeus and take him on different adventures. It's encouraged to send your pictures to the UofM snapchat account where you can be reposted.
6. **Study under Zeus's Tree-** At UofM, our students prioritize academic excellence and what better way to do so under the famous oak tree on the Quad.
7. **Chant the Maltese Fight Song on the Quad**
8. **Maltese Service Walk-** On April 12th, students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to walk around the campus trails and clean up any litter they may see in order to maintain our beautiful campus. Since things are virtual, we ask that these university members go out into their own communities and show how a Maltese takes action.
9. **Get Involved-** There's never a bad time to get involved, so it is encouraged for each student to find at least one student club or organization that they are passionate about. Can't find one? Then gather 3 other students and a faculty/staff advisor to create your own!

Program Overview: "Malta's Traditions"

Mission, Goals, & Outcomes

Malta's Traditions:

- Interactive app available to UofM students, faculty, staff, and alumni
- Influenced by social media platforms (e.g., Snapchat)
- Designed to increase the overall social engagement of first-year students

This year-long program will encourage first-year students to learn about the nine existing traditions of UofM while in their university seminar groups.

Malta's Traditions

Each seminar group will learn about and complete one of the nine existing UofM traditions each month (August-April). After learning about the UofM traditions, each seminar group will suggest a new, tenth tradition for the UofM community to vote on. The winning suggestion will be completed by the UofM community in May. And that winning seminar group will receive university swag and free alumni registration!

Other students, faculty, staff, and alumni are encouraged to engage with the first-year students.

The University of Malta (UofM) aims to support online engagement of first-year students through the implementation of "Malta's Traditions", an interactive application designed to promote sense of belonging, interpersonal relationships, and collaboration among peers.

Program Mission Statement

Goal 1: Sense of Belonging

Goal 2: Interpersonal Relationships

Goal 3: Collaboration Among Peers

Goal 1: Sense of Belonging

Introduce and encourage undergraduate students to participate in university traditions.

Student Learning Outcome:

Understand the importance of university traditions in order to foster community in times of hardship (e.g., COVID-19 and online learning).

Interactive Map:

University stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, faculty, and alumni) can post and interact with "stories" regarding the university traditions. Each seminar group is required to post on the map after completing that corresponding month's tradition.

Goal 1:
Sense of
Belonging

Goal 2:
Interpersonal
Relationships

Goal 3:
Collaboration
Among Peers

Goal 2: Interpersonal Relationships

Promote opportunities for undergraduate students to build community by engaging online.

Student Learning Outcome:

Establish communication with various university stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, faculty, and alumni) in order to produce sustainable campus relationships.

App Messaging System:

UofM affilliated individuals will have the ability to utilize the messaging system. All first-year students will automatically be placed in a group chat with their university seminar in order to complete the traditions as a group.

Goal 1:
Sense of
Belonging

Goal 2:
Interpersonal
Relationships

Goal 3:
Collaboration
Among Peers

Goal 3: Collaboration Among Peers

Enable undergraduate students to work together and develop an understanding of various perspectives while taking an active role within the institution.

Student Learning Outcome:

Partner with their university seminar group in order to contribute a meaningful suggestion regarding the new university tradition.

New Tradition Poll:

After completing the Malta traditions, each university seminar will have the opportunity to submit a suggestion for the new, tenth university tradition. The UofM campus will then have the opportunity to vote on the best one.

Theoretical Framework

Online Engagement Framework for Higher Education (Redmond et. al., 2018)

Online Engagement Framework for Higher Education By Redmond, Abawi, Brown, Henderson & Heffernan (2018)

An Online Engagement Framework for Higher Education

As student affairs professionals, we understand that engagement occurs in- and outside of the classroom (Bektashi, 2018). It is important for institutions to consider the social engagement of students as online learning expands across higher education (Peacock et. al., 2020, Redmond et al., 2018). In this study, five engagement elements are considered "crucial for effective student engagement within the online learning and teaching environment" (p. 189). This model is meant to show the "dynamic nature of online engagement" (p. 190). Each element consists of indicators used to identify a theme of engagement.

Engagement Elements:
- Social
- Cognitive
- Behavioral
- Collaborative
- Emotional

This program will include three engagement elements: *social*, *cognitive*, and *collaborative*.

Online Engagement Framework for Higher Education

This framework was chosen to address the **lack of social engagement among UofM first-year students** previously mentioned by the Senior Council. The framework consists of five engagement elements (social, cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and emotional), each with their own indicators. This framework is not linear or hierarchical as each element can be potentially seen in another. In the case of our program, "Malta's Traditions", we will be focusing on the **social, cognitive and collaborative** aspects of online engagement while recognizing that behavioral and emotional engagement may linger among our goals and outcomes. These three engagement elements were the most persistent within the layout of our program.

01.

Social Engagement

Redefined as student participation in non-academic, social collegiate experiences (in-person and virtual).

Indicators: Building Community, Creating a Sense of Belonging, and Developing Relationships

First-year students will be able to find community within their university seminar groups and the larger UofM campus by learning and participating in the Malta Traditions which will create a sense of belonging (i.e., becoming a Maltese)

02.

Cognitive Engagement

Students becoming "engaged learners" by utilizing deep cognitive skills (Redmond et. al., 2020).

Indicators: Thinking Critically, Integrating Ideas, and Deep Cognitive Understanding

After the existing traditions are completed, each university seminar group will have the opportunity to work together and develop a suggestion for the new, tenth Maltese tradition. Students will have to exhibit a deep level of cognitive engagement by justifying the group suggestion (i.e., explaining why their tradition would be the best choice; 2018).

03.

Collaborative Engagement

"...the development of different relationships and networks that support learning, including collaboration with peers, instructors, industry, and the educational institution" (Redmond et al., 2018, p. 194)

Indicators: Learning with Peers, Relating to Faculty, Connecting to Institutional Opportunities

First-year students will be able to relate to other UofM members while learning the traditions with their peer groups. Those participating in the program will become better connected to various aspects of the institution including potential resources and expected behaviors.
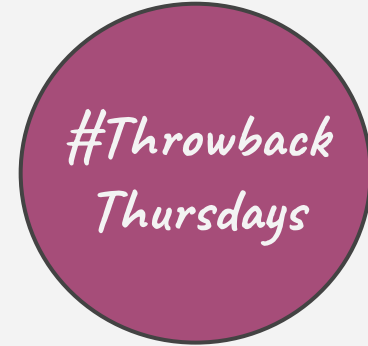
Media & Marketing Plan

Malta's Traditions

#Throwback Thursdays

01.
Display promotional video of app on social media platforms (e.g., Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram)

02.
Have upperclassmen orientation and tour guide leaders do social media takeovers while doing a Malta Tradition.
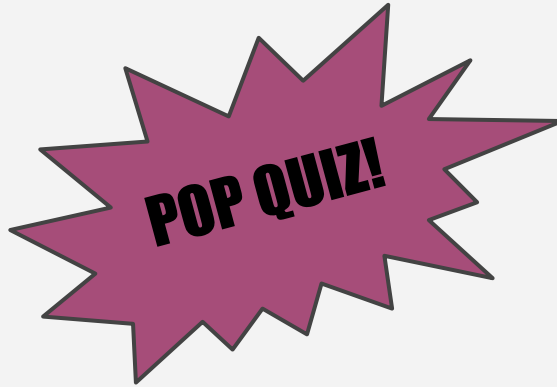
03.
Throwback Thursdays for university stakeholders to share their university tradition memories.

Media & Marketing Plan

POP QUIZ!

04.
Tradition Pop Quizzes
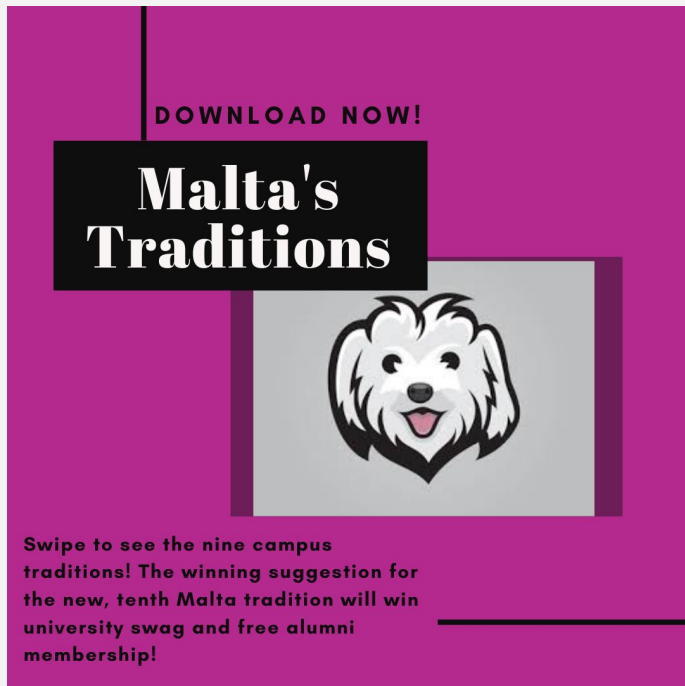(Eventually a list of the campus traditions will be posted on social media for reference).

05.
Mascot Promotion: Zeus the Maltese will advertise the app while completing the different Malta Traditions.

Media & Marketing Plan Example

DOWNLOAD NOW!

Malta's Traditions

Swipe to see the nine campus traditions! The winning suggestion for the new, tenth Malta tradition will win university swag and free alumni membership!

The "Malta's Traditions" App will be available for free on the App Store as well as the Google Play Store. Those downloading the app will need to sign in using their university credentials.

Since each Malta tradition is inclusive of the UofM hybrid learning model (in-person and virtual), each first-year student should be able to complete the tradition with their university seminar group.

Bektashi, L. (2018). Community of Inquiry Framework in online learning: Use of technology. Technology and the Curriculum: Summer 2018.

Dorimé-Williams, M. L., & Shults, C. (2019). Conducting Comprehensive Assessment Within Community Colleges: Administrative, Educational, and Student Support (AES) Assessment with the Shults Dorimé-Williams Taxonomy. New directions for community colleges, 2019(186), 61-69.

Peacock, S., Cowan, J., Irvine, L., & Williams, J. (2020). An exploration into the importance of a sense of belonging for online learners. International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 21(2), 18-35.

Redmond, P., Abawi, L. A., Brown, A., Henderson, R., & Heffernan, A. (2018). An online engagement framework for higher education. Online learning, 22(1), 183-204.