Zoom University:

An Evolutionary, Virtual Network for Undergraduate Students

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Scenario

- We are a small liberal arts college that cannot rely on heady, athletics-based traditions to sustain our undergraduate base
- Our plan is to create a system that *engages and supports students* from the moment they commit to our school and fosters a sense of community that begins online but that can continue in-person

Learning Outcomes

1. First year students will be able to foster a sense of belonging amongst their peers by engaging in a living environment that adopts a residential college model, applicable to a virtual setting.. Assessment will be completed with a survey to residents upon entering the program and upon exiting.
2. First year students will develop a sense of mattering through the intentional programming provided through the virtual living-learning model.
3. First year students will observe a community of global citizens who celebrate diversity and view themselves as part of a greater global community in the residential college model.

01

Development

Creation and Foundation

Social Engagement

- Social engagement involves building rapport, respect, and trust to create a sense of belonging and group cohesion within a learning community (Sinha et al., 2015).
- Social engagement can be used to better motivate students to get involved with their curricula and other campus activities” (Mouzakis, 2017).

Residential and Living Learning Models

- We plan to use a combination of living/learning and residential models and adapt it to the virtual space
- We believe that this foundation will cultivate an atmosphere of commitment, belonging, and tradition-building that will anchor students in university life

“Students who have engaged in … learning communities have 3 broadened their experiences, and acquired skills and experiences that have supported students’ development of ‘ownership’ of their collegiate experiences. Because of the importance of student engagement, it has served as a critical indicator by which colleges and universities gauge their success.”

—Tinto, 2001

Student Development Opportunities

- Our program will involve creating communities to foster belonging and connection to the college from wherever they are located.
- Within the program, there will be planned activities and opportunities to interact with peers, upperclassmen, staff and faculty in informal settings.
- These activities and challenges throughout the year will allow students to all take opportunities to lead the group they are part of and explore various approaches to learning and connection with others which is key to strengthening their engagement (Reeve et al., 2004).
- When students work effectively with others, their engagement may be amplified as a result, mostly due to experiencing a sense of connection to others during the activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000, Wentzel, 2009)
- This program also provides upperclassmen with opportunities to learn program implementation, mentoring and leadership skills in purposeful ways.
- Concepts of equity and access are paramount throughout in thinking through activities, events and support.

Community of Inquiry (COI) Model

The COI model, (Garrison et al., 2000) makes the case that online discussion is most effective when students have a cognitive presence, a social presence and a teaching presence in the discussion. In this model, students attain a cognitive presence in the community through forming their own inquiries. They achieve social presence by engaging with and being exposed to other engaged peers. It's equally critical (if not more so) that students themselves have a teaching presence in the community, which is obtained through self-regulation, peer moderation and discussion facilitation through their own inquiries. It may sound counterintuitive, but **instructors who encourage their students to act as stewards and moderators of the community end up seeing more substantive engagement.**

02

Implementation

Preparation and Execution

Steering Committee

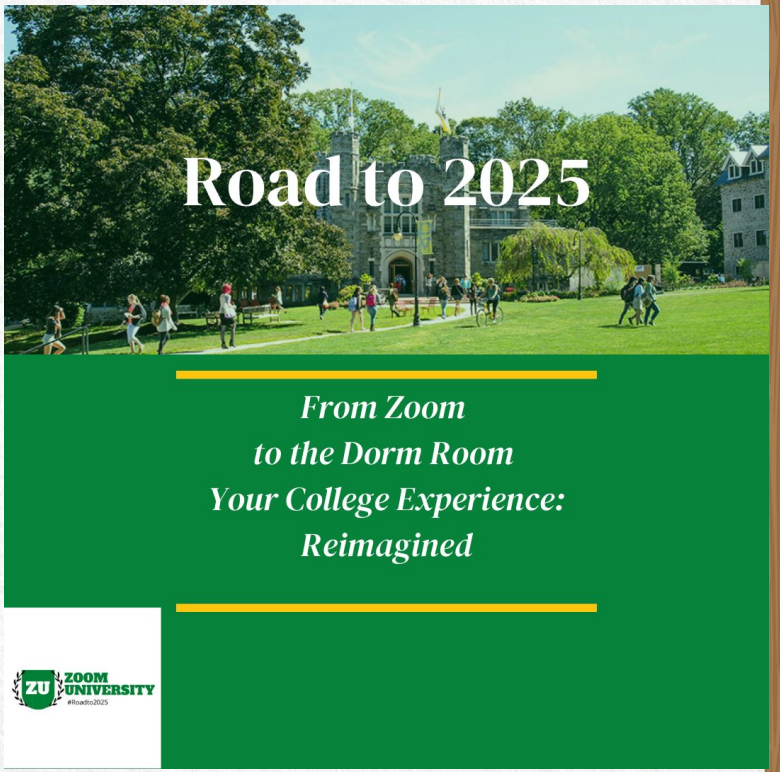
- Creation of a steering committee
  - Dean of Students, Director of Student Activities, Academic Dean, Program Coordinators, (at least) 4 current students
- Incredibly important to have current student buy-in
  - Phrase it like a class gift, giving the students below a chance for a reimagined college experience
- Steering committee will:
  - Build out the personality/sorting quiz
  - Determine how many “houses” there will be
  - Select students to lead the houses
  - Solicit participation and appoint faculty/advisors to each of the houses
  - Plan activities and coordinate at-home gift phases

Sorting and Creation of Communities

- When students commit to attending, we will then launch

The Road to 2025

- Incoming students will receive primer emails with clues and hints towards what will be ahead of them to build anticipation and increase engagement (Parker, 2018).
- Begins with an extensive, personality-driven Myers-Brigg type quiz
    - Combined with Netflix show preferences, goals and values for an ideal college experience
- Once assigned into houses, students will have the opportunity to choose their own house name and color.
- Gen-Z is all about customization (Seemiller & Grace, 2017) - our goal is to provide that for them within the margins of our own university!



Sorting and Creation of Communities cont.

- Upperclassmen selected as student leaders will create group chat without faculty advisor to allow for informal connection and bonding during the summer.
- Will culminate with **House Day**, where students will meet their counselors, faculty advisors, fellow members, house motto (that they voted for)
- First task will be designing their own flag
- Creation of communities based on shared set of goals and values based on what they want out of the college
- There will be monthly college sponsored events but houses are encouraged to engage with each other beyond those scheduled.
- The house with the most points will be eligible to choose the theme of the Bye-Bye BBQ at the end of the year that all students will be invited to attend

Promotion & Marketing

- Incoming students will receive primer emails with clues and hints towards what will be ahead of them to build anticipation and increase engagement (Parker, 2018).
- These teasers will be launched as soon as students commit to the college to encourage recruitment in this program.
- Following these primers, there will be introduction videos and hype videos from upperclassmen involved in the program, as well as the staff and faculty who will be involved. Chances to engage with staff and faculty in informal settings allows for greater student engagement across all areas (Yearwood & Jones, 2012).
- To share these materials we will engage on the college's YouTube Channel, Instagram (feed, Reels & stories), and encourage upperclassmen to share videos on TikTok.

College ... Reimagined

A House Portal will serve as the students' home base for announcements, meeting times, connecting with members, etc. All designed with their motto/name and theme!

Calendar of Events for Fall

September

- Houses design their flags to build a sense of community
  - Student coordinators will take the final idea from each house and turn it into a laptop sticker and mail it to every student
- Icebreaker and bonding games (virtual scavenger hunt, virtual door decorating in assigned pairs)
- Weekly check-in meetings at a university-sanctioned time where no classes meet
- First Night - beginning of the semester where we virtually hear from alums, given a token that you can later pin to your robes at graduation

October

- Gamify introduction, halfway celebration with a self-care kit
- Points collected for most creative instagram takeover

November & December

- Holiday-themed, reflection, etc. Cookie decorating, finals prep

Calendar of Events for Spring

January

- **Coffee Shop/Karaoke/Open Mic:** not so much a competition as it is an event that all of the teams can gather together and share space and community. Students will receive a coffee mug over the break with #roadto2025 and house flag.

February

- **Jeopardy:** Online formats widely available. Aim would be to have a famous influencer/YouTube channel host be the facilitator and the houses will nominate a representative from each house to compete in each round. The winners will acquire points.

March & April

- **Game Tournament:** If college was hybrid and outside activities are permitted, dodgeball/kickball etc. tournament could be created. If this is not possible, then a virtual Jackbox (or other) game tournament can be arranged.

May

- **Bye-Bye BBQ:** Ceremonious event to end the school year and gather everyone together in a non-competitive space to share in community. Theme chosen by house with the most points. If this is virtual it can be a zoom mocktail happy hour and students will be mailed a bbq meal to make at home sponsored by HelloFresh.

03

Evaluation

Assessment and Beyond

Assessment

- Initial survey for first-year students to gauge expectations for program
- Mid-year check-in to determine if changes need/should be made based on feedback
- Follow up after at end of academic year to assess if learning outcomes were achieved

Future Applications

We believe it will take a full student cycle (minimum 4 years) to truly evaluate the impact and significance of this program. Our intentions would be to have events throughout the 4 years that the houses can participate in with their peers, with an end of year celebration each year.

At the graduation ceremony for the end of each ‘road’, we would encourage wearing the pins given out in their first year to denote their house affiliation, and plan events based on these communities.

Planning this program as a full journey throughout the academic careers of the students, demonstrates the level of care and importance of belonging we hold as student affairs professionals. One individual event can not truly make a student feel like they belong, but the ongoing demonstrated commitment and investment from the college in their success and engagement on multiple levels can last a lifetime.

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