

Weber State – Shepherd Union External Review Report

Review Team

The external review of the Shepherd Union was conducted on February 9-10, 2017 by Wendy Denman, Colleen Packer, and Clayton Oyler.

Shepherd Union Summary

The Shepherd Union at Weber State is a vibrant center for the campus and community. The union is located in the heart of campus and provides easy access from the parking lot and academic buildings. The school colors of purple and white are found throughout the building in carpet, furniture, and structural elements, giving a sense of school spirit and pride. The staff of the union and tenant offices are very friendly and welcoming. The building offers four floors of meeting spaces, resources for students, and informal gathering spaces, which during the day are filled with students congregating and studying. The union also offers a few unique spaces including a Bowling Alley, Art Gallery, and Meditation room. The union is very clean with no visible safety concerns.

The internal report described a large turnover in the union leadership positions and the reorganization of some roles and reporting lines. Given the substantial changes that have taken place, the external review team inquired about how students, faculty, and staff felt about the current leadership and status of the union. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive that the new team has brought needed improvements and leadership to the Shepherd Union. Students and full time staff within the building reported feeling supported, feeling heard, and feeling they were integral to creating and achieving goals. Campus community members also indicated that the new leadership has brought fresh life and positive improvements to the building. For instance, in the course of the past year, needed purchases have replaced or upgraded aging furnishings and facilities, and new processes have been implemented to better accommodate both staff and customers of the union. In addition, communication has improved between the various areas of the union such that the staff members have felt engaged in the changes and less isolated than they did previously.

In addition, the staff was recognized for their excellence in the customer service they are providing the campus community. Numerous individual staff members were mentioned by name in appreciation for the care and service they provide through their work. In fact, all functional areas of the union were given praise.

While the Shepherd Union has much to offer, it was clear that there were also areas for improvement. The major areas for growth could be summarized to include staffing, policies, space/facilities, wayfinding, marketing, assessment, and food. Each area will be discussed in more depth, including recommendations for improvement.

STAFFING

The union has gone through many changes, including a large number of recent positive refocusing and reorganizing efforts. This report acknowledges and applauds these far-reaching positives, but will give most space to additional potential areas for enhancement.

Previous to the reorganization, areas within the union such as operations, reservations, conferences and events, the information desk, bowling/billiards, and student involvement and leadership largely worked independently from one another. Not only was there a lack of adequate communication between areas of the union staff, there was not even a common uniform to promote team identity. Now, the team is functioning much more as one department with a common set of policies. Staff meetings and operational meetings have been put in place to increase communication.

While the current professional staff team has largely gone through these changes together, it is also important to have a system in place for bringing new team members on board and acclimating them to the culture and policies of the department for the future. This is especially true when having many functional areas in one department.

Recommendations

Create a Comprehensive Onboarding Program for Full Time & Student Staff

Putting in place an onboarding program for professional and student staff will afford individuals an introduction to the policies, practices, and culture of the department. Aiding this effort, professional staff indicated that many training manuals and policies are currently being reviewed and updated, as many have not been updated since 2011. Onboarding includes, “all formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 268). In other words, “onboarding, is a process through which new employees move from being organizational outsiders to become organizational insiders (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 51). A common model is to inform, welcome, and guide (Klein & Polin, 2012). *Informing* refers to providing information and materials an incomer needs to be successful in the form of communication, resources, and training. *Welcoming* includes activities and practices that facilitate relationship building and assist new employees to feel welcome and included. *Guiding* involves giving personal guidance to the newcomer during the transition, which can be done by supervisors, coworkers, and mentors. Onboarding is a team effort and involves helping newcomers adapt to the job as well as to the culture of the organization. Onboarding includes making plans for incoming employees from before their first day through at least the first 90 days of their employment. Effective onboarding can result in improved job performance, better employee engagement, and higher retention.

Following onboarding, it is also important to provide ongoing opportunities for professional engagement and development. The director supports staff members to travel to a regional and a national conference, but indicated that some staff do not want to travel or do not desire to take advantage of these opportunities. It might, therefore, be beneficial to broaden the scope of

professional development opportunities in which staff members can partake. For instance, perhaps funds could support online webinars, professional memberships, or online classes. There are also professional development opportunities offered through the university and community such as Coaches Certification, Spring Break trainings, Work Place Learning, and the Utah Women in Higher Education Network – Provo. Providing a greater range of options may encourage more staff members to take advantage of professional development.

Develop a Comprehensive Student Employee Program

In terms of student staff, there is a need for a comprehensive student employee program that includes training, recognition, and evaluation. The leadership has already been making strides in this area. Currently, the team now has consistent uniforms and developmental trainings offered on a monthly basis to all student staff. The current employment plan is based on performance competencies, but the staff also may want to consider incorporating foundations from ACUI student learning outcomes for student employees or CAS student learning and development outcomes. There should be a common foundation that carries through how students are trained, recognized, and evaluated.

Student staff training should be ongoing and include orientation, training on job skills, and student development. Orientation is the time to introduce students to the organizational structure, mission, vision, and values of the department as well as roles, goals, and expectations. Training programs fulfill several purposes including educating about policies, procedures, and practices; leading staff to accomplish tasks; providing resources and mentoring; and empowering staff. The union team has begun to implement a training plan, including monthly ongoing development put on by individuals across campus. While the development is staff driven, students get to provide input on topics. In addition, students are now participating in the Get Set program offered through the division.

When recognition is done well, it reinforces behaviors that support and further the mission, goals, and values of the organization. Recognition is most successful when it is ongoing and is conducted by everyone. The current recognition program focuses on “Of The Month” awards. While this type of recognition works well initially, in the long run, it typically does not retain its benefits. For instance, if individuals are truly being recognized on merit, the same people tend to keep winning; if it is believed that everyone should be recognized at least once, then the recognition loses its value and tends to start being viewed as merely someone’s turn to win. In addition, typically only the leaders of the organization determine the winner of this type of award. While it is important for individuals to receive feedback from leaders – both praise and constructive criticism – employees tend to feel more appreciated when the feedback comes from peers, customers, and other individuals that employees don’t view as being “obligated” to recognize them. In addition, recognition is best when it is specific and personalized. Rather than simply saying “thank you,” saying thank you for a particular behavior or characteristic has a greater impact. In addition, individuals prefer to receive recognition in different ways; for instance, some prefer public recognition, while others feel uneasy when being recognized publically. Recognition should be easy, frequent, specific, and be based on common values, expectations, or goals. While there are many resources available, Baudville.com is an example of a website that provides ideas and recognition tools, such as peer “Shout Outs,” that are easy to

implement. Finally, ceremonial recognition is a form of appreciation that employees do appreciate from the top-down, such as end-of-the-year banquets. Banquets/ceremonies are great opportunities to recognize top achievers, employee longevity, and to celebrate successes as a team.

In addition, there needs to be a system of accountability and evaluation that reinforces the same mission, goals, and values on which the training and recognition are based. Feedback is important for continued growth and improvement of skills. Accountability is vital to ensure that standards are being met across employees. Informal feedback through 1:1 meetings is essential with a more structured and comprehensive evaluation conducted annually. Annual evaluations are a great method for determining the outstanding performers who deserve raises or promotions, as well. The current student staff structure is not based on a tiered system, e.g., student staff start as set up crew at a minimum wage, and then building managers who have greater responsibility earn a higher wage, whereas your best crew can at some point be elevated to the building manager positions. Providing opportunities for advancement can serve as a way to retain quality staff members for longer and can also be a motivation for staff members to perform at a higher level. Professional staff members also need to be evaluated annually through the PREP.

Consider Adding Day-Time Student Building Managers

Currently, student building managers only work during the evenings after professional staff have left for the day. Several of the students expressed a desire for more training. During the day, the custodial staff accomplish set ups for rooms as well as clean the building. The union has the most traffic from students, faculty, staff, and events during the daytime hours. While the custodial team enjoys the dual responsibilities, at times it is challenging for them to keep up with room flips as well as all cleaning needs. Adding student building managers/operations crew during the day would be beneficial to assist with room flips and also allow students to shadow and learn from supervisors and the custodial team.

As a side note, there was some concern expressed about only having a few students on staff at night. Student staff noted that at times it is difficult to get students to listen to them to leave the building, etc. There was not enough information to make a full recommendation to remedy this, but it might be worth further review.

POLICIES

The internal report indicated that many policies are currently under review. The need for this was reinforced through the interview process, especially in the area of Scheduling Events, and Conferencing. For instance, there needs to be clear deadlines on when final set ups/diagrams are due from customers to the scheduling office so that staff members have adequate time to plan and execute individual client needs. In addition, if a group is waitlisted, there needs to be a policy in place for when the client can expect to have confirmation on whether or not the space will be given to them in order to plan accordingly. Similarly, groups need to have a hard deadline for when they need to release any spaces that they will not be using for their final reservation. Many groups often overbook potential spaces they will need and then cancel additional spaces at the last minute, which does not give other groups the opportunity to use the remaining spaces.

Recommendation

Expedite the Implementation of Virtual EMS

While the staff were praised for their excellence in customer service, it was also expressed that it can be a challenging process to have to book every event by phone or back and forth emails. The union is in the process of adding a Virtual EMS option where clients could book the majority of events online and only would need to meet with a staff member to create a diagram or review set up details. *This would be a tremendous benefit in time saved for both the staff and clients.* The union has been in the process of working with IT to get this going for approximately the past nine months and is now in the phase of creating the back end (completing database information in EMS needed for each space that will be reserved) of the process to make this possible. This process can still take a long time, especially if one person is working on it who already has a very full set of responsibilities. Given the tremendous asset this will be to the campus, it may be worth looking at the option of paying for assistance through EMS or seeing if there is an IT person who could additionally assist with the process.

SPACE/FACILITIES

While the union offers a wide variety of important spaces for the campus, including meeting rooms, lounges, resource offices, entertainment space, and unique spaces such as the Art Gallery, and Meditation room, many comments indicated that space needs to be evaluated to ensure it is adequate for the needs of each purpose and also to maximize utilization.

Recommendations

Conduct a Space Audit to Determine How Space Can Be Best Maximized

One area of concern voiced was regarding tenant spaces in the union. Many of the tenants expressed that they love being in the convenient and high traffic building of the union; however, many of the staff teams in these areas have grown, while their space has remained the same. If the space does not meet the needs of the office, it may need to be evaluated whether or not the space can be reconfigured or if an alternate space can be designated.

Additionally, there may be some opportunities to alter or exchange how current space is being used. For example, it was indicated that the following locations were underutilized: the fire place lounge, the art gallery, the meditation room, the radio station space, Wells Fargo, as well as the bowling alley and billiards. There are many reasons space could be underutilized including, but not limited to, lack of awareness of the spaces, lack of wayfinding to the spaces, lack of understanding of the purpose of space, lack of needed furnishings or equipment, negative previous experience with the space, and lack of interest or demand for the space.

Also, some spaces are not ideally located, such as the Money Management office and the Quiet Study Lounge. For instance, the Money Management office is currently within the space for Scheduling, Events, and Conferences (SEC). First of all, having one office that has a separate function and purpose inside of another service office, is confusing. Secondly, the SEC office

ideally needs more space to meet with customers. The Quiet Study Lounge is located in an area where there is high traffic and it is not quiet. Therefore, it creates tension for students who go there for quiet study, and it is frustrating for those around the lounge who want to be loud and are asked to keep the noise down.

Suggestions for Possible Space Solutions:

- Reevaluate the Bowling Alley and assess if students really value this space for entertainment. While the Bowling Alley is a fun and unique space, it is not getting a draw on evenings and weekends. In addition, the space is expensive to maintain. Certainly before further investing in potential expensive updates to equipment and facilities, it is essential to assess the value of providing that space. In fact, students indicated that they like having a bowling alley, but they don't go there because it costs money for them to play. Also, there is competition from other bowling alleys in town that while less convenient, they are larger and have more bells and whistles. Given that there is a very small population of students living on campus, perhaps a bowling alley is not the best use of space in the union. An additional challenge in evaluating the space is that the space is currently used for classes during the day. However, the classes do not pay for the upkeep of the facilities.
- For similar reasons the Billiards area needs to be reevaluated. While it is popular for classes, the number of tables is unnecessary from an entertainment stand point. Other than classes, the majority of the tables are underutilized. If there were fewer tables, there would be more room either to add other gaming opportunities or to reconfigure the space for other entertainment options.
- The Art Gallery is a unique space and a wonderful addition to the union. However, it was mentioned frequently as a space that has little traffic. Increased wayfinding could assist with this. However, when space is at a premium, it could be a solution to create a walking art gallery space in one of the lounges that would generate more traffic and free up the current gallery space for other needs. Glass or a similar product would need to be used to protect the art in a walking space, but more people would potentially be exposed to the art.
- The Meditation room, while a beautiful space, is not being used for its intended purpose. If this is not a desired or needed space, perhaps it could be repurposed for either the Money Management office or needed storage space.
- Consider moving the Money Management office to a first floor location if possible. This will expose more students to the services and allow the SEC office the spacing they need.
- Consider moving the Quiet Study Lounge to the fourth floor, where it is already quieter. For instance, room 405 has technology that needs to be updated, making it a less ideal meeting space. Perhaps this could be converted into a Quiet Lounge/Study space.
- Consider turning the current Quiet Study room into either a meeting room or a Group Study space instead. The library already provides quiet spaces to study. The student union is a place for students to gather, connect, and interact. When we asked students where else they gather, the new Science building was the most frequent answer. The Science building has ideal places for students to interact and study in groups. Some unions are implementing furniture such as this example by Steel City Display:



to create interactive study spaces.

- Keep an eye on the increasing utilization of the meeting rooms. Within the next five years, it is likely that more meeting rooms will be necessary to meet the growing needs of the campus.
- Assess foot traffic in rental areas to determine if footprint (square footage) is being best utilized for the campus.

Create a Long-Term Deferred Maintenance and Capital Plan for the Union

While the union has put into place a five year plan for future purchases that will cover repair and replacement of furnishings and equipment, a similar schedule needs to be implemented that projects for the needs of the aging facility as a whole. A deferred maintenance plan looks at the projected lifespan of larger items, such as flooring, painting of interior/exterior, electrical systems, roofing, wall systems, HVAC/mechanical systems, and structural elements and then funds are set aside accordingly in the operating budget. This allows for major repairs as well as planning to restore or replace major building components when they reach the end of their useful lives. Failure to do so can result in major costs that are not affordable in the annual operating budget. The plan should include both preventative and corrective actions. The first step would be to assess the current condition of such elements and determine the projected lifespan in addition to determining the approximate costs of repair/replacement so that money can begin to be set aside in preparation for future expenses. In determining costs of repair/replacement, inflation should be taken into consideration. Another method of budgeting for deferred maintenance is to put aside a certain percentage of the overall value of the building and its contents, which would be designated in the insurance plan. The percentage set aside should take into consideration the age and current condition of facilities, but generally, 2%-3% is a good standard. Setting aside even a small percentage on an annual basis begins to develop accumulating funds for major expenses down the road. Additionally, the union is responsible for the maintenance of the tenant spaces. Items such as paint, carpet, etc. need to be taken into consideration in the long term capital planning.

Discontinue Providing Laptops to Clients in Meeting Rooms

Due to the extent of furnishings and equipment that need to be replaced in the building, a suggestion to save some costs would be to discontinue providing laptop computers in meeting

rooms. Most clients have their own laptops and this would decrease the costs of replacement for the short-term and long-term. Given the wear and tear that laptops receive, and the rate that technology advances, this decision provides many advantages. In addition, many times clients prefer using their own laptops because they already have their own programs and documents loaded on them. The union could have a minimal number of spare laptops for clients who either forget, or have a laptop that is incompatible for some reason.

WAYFINDING

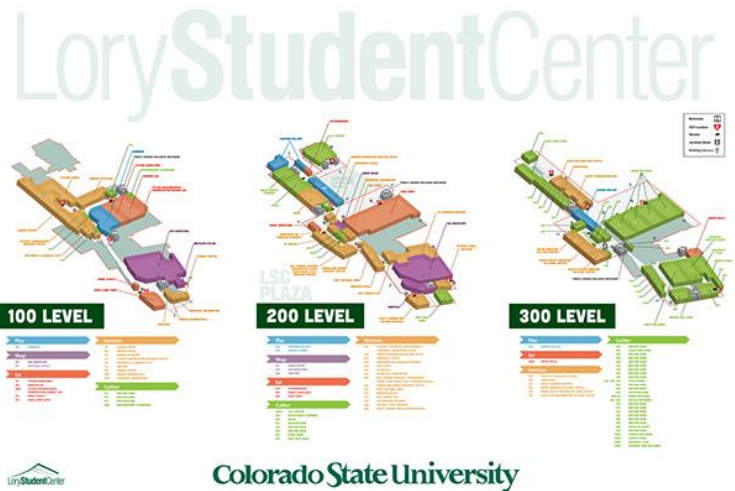
While the Shepherd union offers important resources to students and the campus, many of the students, faculty, and staff had limited awareness of everything available and also expressed that it was difficult to navigate the building. Some students stated they were even unaware that there was a fourth floor. While there are floor layout maps available at the information desk and online, the visual signage in walking spaces is limited. Some areas have good signage on the offices or rooms themselves, but there is not visible directional signage to guide guests to these spaces. Some particularly hidden spaces include the theater, Wildcat Lanes, the meditation room, and the fourth floor.

Recommendation

Evaluate and Install Improved Wayfinding Throughout the Building

Wayfinding refers to systems of information to help users navigate the physical environment. Wayfinding is especially important in complex environments. The Shepherd Union has multiple entrances into the building, some of which are on different levels. In addition, some areas—such as the fourth floor—can only be accessed by taking a certain route. Some student unions use zoning to aid in navigation. Zoning refers to dividing space by designated purposes, such as by having separate floors for retail, student services, and meeting rooms. Given the complexity of spaces in the Shepherd Union, this may not be possible. The other primary way to navigate space is through wayfinding. There are many types of wayfinding, including overhead signage, displays, interactive digital kiosks, and floor signage.





In addition, signage can be permanent or temporary and be made from a variety of materials. In a student union, space designation often changes – which should be taken into consideration when choosing types of signage. A fairly cost effective method can be using vinyl adhesive, which can be printed in very large sizes. Digital signage is the easiest to keep current. Rather than choosing just one method, the entire system of wayfinding should be taken into consideration and then implemented accordingly, which likely will include different types of signage for different purposes. Wayfinding signage typically fulfills four purposes: information, direction, identification, and warning.

Another consideration in terms of wayfinding, may be replacing the numbers for all of the rooms with names. It was indicated several times that the numbering system was confusing to users in the building and numbers are often harder to remember. Creating names for rooms can be a great way to get students involved in the process! Students can generate names that mean Weber pride to them and then these can be used for room names.

MARKETING

In addition to improved means of wayfinding, it was evident that the union would benefit from having staff to focus on marketing in order to better communicate the many services and programs it has to offer. The interviews revealed that many people, including faculty, staff, and students lacked awareness of the many resources and opportunities offered by the union. There is enough to market in the union as an entity to necessitate a person dedicated to this responsibility.

It is important for the union to be able to tell its story to the campus and inform the community of the many benefits and opportunities that it provides. In addition, the union is an ever changing place, where programs and services are frequently updated. Finally, the union has to market to external users in order to generate revenue to support the budget.

Recommendation

Add Staff to Address the Needs for Marketing, Social Media, and Graphic Design

The ideal solution would be to add a full-time staff position for Shepherd Union Marketing and Graphic Design. The person in this position could focus on doing target marketing to the various constituents of the university as well as to the external community groups and conferences. This position could also plan and implement strategies to address the wayfinding needs in the building. In addition, the person could manage the various social media accounts, which currently is the most successful method of outreaching to students. If it is not possible to add a full-time position, an alternative may be to create two student worker positions—one to focus on social media and one to do graphic design. If students are to be employed, perhaps the 50%/50% program can be used to make it more affordable.

ASSESSMENT

There is a need to improve assessment among all functional areas of the Shepherd Union. This is an area that the internal report also indicated could be improved. There are not methods put into practice currently within all functional areas to assess customer service, student learning and development, and effectiveness of services. In addition, for assessments that have been implemented, such as the Educational Benchmarking Institute (EBI) for Student Unions Survey, the data has not been discussed and used to make changes. Assessment is important to ensure that the goals and mission of the department are being achieved as well as to confirm that student learning and development is being attained. However, assessment is only useful when the results are then reflected upon and used to reinforce current practice or make necessary improvements.

FOOD

An unexpected area that came up in the majority of the interviews was a dissatisfaction with food available through retail and catering. While individuals spoke of a positive relationship with staff members in Sodexo, there seemed to be a disconnect in understanding between what Sodexo was providing and some of the needs/wants of the campus. This is a challenge for every campus and not an uncommon complaint. Food service is a business that has to generate revenue to be successful. When there is a small number of boarders/mandatory meal plans, this adds additional pressure and often increased prices in retail and catering. People always want the best food, the most options, and the lowest price. However, realistically, there has to be some combination of these variables to be practical. In this case, there may be some improvements that can be made, and in some cases perhaps just more communication is needed as to why some desires cannot be met. Since the majority of interviews revealed a desire for food improvement, even small gains in communicated concern, perhaps flavored with some acknowledgment of constraints, might have a substantial satiating effect on satisfaction.

Recommendation

Have the Union Advisory Board Conduct a Food Service Survey with the Campus Community

While Sodexo may currently conduct their own surveys and market research, sometimes it is helpful to have an external survey done focused on the questions and concerns of the community. This would be a great project for the Union Advisory Board. Some specific concerns expressed were:

- Perceptions that prices have increased but quality has not
- Desire to be able to bring food trucks on campus for special events
- Healthier options in retail i.e. soups and salads
- No food service available at night (Waldo's Corner Pocket is tucked away and many did not even know there is food available at night); perhaps consider adding a Simply-To-Go station that would require minimal staffing
(<http://thedolphinlmc.com/opinion/2012/02/09/simply-to-go-is-simply-good/>)
- Would like signs with ingredients for food in Wild Cat room
- High cost of catering
- Desire for brand names, such as Popeye's Chicken/Chick-fil-a
- Long food lines at lunch time (perhaps add a Simply-To-Go station in another part of union)
- Would like food options for Orientation (perhaps a partnership could be worked out within the cost charged for Orientation)
- Catering does not check often enough for things missing or refills needed during events

Once the survey is complete, the Union Advisory Board could then sit down with Food Service to discuss the results and possible solutions to include both increased communication and possible improvements.

Final Summary

In conclusion, the Shepherd Union has much to be proud of and has an excellent team in place. The team is already heading in the right direction and has made many improvements to the facilities and in creating staff unity within the department. The external team hopes that the recommendations made in the areas of staffing, policies, space/facilities, wayfinding, marketing, assessment, and food provide practical solutions for future enhancement and growth.

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