

College Project Award (Alpha Omicron Eta Chapter) College Project Award Project Topic (include a short project topic heading such as Establishing a Campus Food Pantry)

Focus Groups for Student Success

Please check off the focus area your College Project addresses (check all that apply):

COLLEGE_RESOURCES | OTHER Other for CP Focus Student Success - Strategic Planning

Optional: Chapters may attach up to three tables, charts, or photographs that illuminate their College Project. No more than three attachments are allowed per College Project entry. No additional explanation may be included in the attached table, chart or picture. Tables, charts or pictures should be explained in the body of the 1,600-word entry.

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Briefly describe your College Project and how it directly supported your college's mission/current priorities. (All rubrics apply, especially Preparation Rubric.)

Our college project is conducting focus groups to learn more about our students, their needs, and the inconveniences they experience, especially post-pandemic. This is a continuation of a previous student success survey conducted in 2022 which identified student success strategies. The President revealed that transitional pandemic recovery as a priority for the college, focusing on resiliency and hope. The chapter prepared ideas that aligned with the mission statement and strategic priority areas of enrollment, engagement, and student success. It was felt that conducting focus groups with students would give rich insight into the direction of the 2023 strategic plan. The data collected would support rationales for improvement processes and contribute to a desired post-pandemic recovery, while impacting the strategic areas of student persistence, student success, and enrollment.

Describe the planning process in detail including who was involved in determining the project. Please Note: It's acceptable to list individual job titles or departments/organizations rather than listing everyone by name. (All rubrics apply, especially Preparation Rubric.)

The chapter met with the College Administration on February 23, 2023, to present the impact of the 2022 College Project and discuss the next project. The President shared ideas surrounding the expansion of the project as one where the strategic plan could be supported by a transitional recovery plan for pandemic recovery, enhancing the resilience and hope for the campus, its students, faculty and staff, thereby enhancing student success. There was a desire from administration to gather in-depth, in-person responses through open-ended questions. Prior to implementation, there was a clear and mutual agreement with administration to discover critical impacts upon the student college experience. The agreed upon methodology was to use focus groups with the hopeful outcome of revealing strategic

priorities with actionable items to create an improved learning environment for students. The planning process was governed through the Institutional Review Board guided by its chairman, the Vice President of Academic Affairs. The Communications Department partnered with the chapter to assist with communication about the project, facilitation resources for the officer team, and incentives with focus group participants. The chapter advisor assisted with sending out registration using Microsoft forms and reserving rooms and funds for food for the two focus groups. Breakfast was even prepared by Dr. Rodes.

What knowledge, skills and abilities did members need to successfully implement this College Project? How did members strengthen these areas before implementing the project? (All rubrics apply, especially Leadership Development Rubric.)

Chapter members effectively organized their project responsibilities by promoting vision and purpose; encouraging peers to participate in focus groups; informing students how to access and register; organizing efforts with administration for meetings and presentations; professionalism and strategic thinking by creating focus groups compliant with IRB through an updated formal application process; teamwork developed with the addition of two new officers; appropriate delegation during officer transitions; adaptive marketing strategies through stall talks, QR codes, a promotional video, and Microsoft Forms. The skill of fiscal responsibility was recognized as we “saved thousands of dollars” in completing this project that would otherwise have been contracted to a private research company. Skill strengthening was gained through regional conferences participation, edge programs, advisor coaching, team meetings, mentoring, rehearsal prior to presentations, and feedback from presentations. We honed our marketing skills by improving focus group promotion, confidence by expanding our comfort zone in communication and delegation as we clarified individual roles, while working towards each other’s strengths and helping in areas of weakness. A weakness was lack of experience in facilitation and execution of focus groups. To develop facilitation skills, the officer team participated in online training and mentoring. Strengthening these areas became evident through administrative feedback. Presentation comments recognized the chapter’s growth in leadership skills, communication, professional dress, handout preparation, commitment despite competing responsibilities, consistency of dedication, confidence, professionalism, and, as stated by the Director of Communications, “I think the collaboration between PTK and the administration has been great. I have really enjoyed working with the group.”

How did the chapter carry out the project and communicate with all collaborators? (All rubrics apply, especially Communications/Cooperative Effort Rubric)

The main challenge occurred when the initial commitment from Administration became ambiguous through leadership and organizational structure changes. What was agreed on in budget allocation shifted from the college to the chapter. The officer team had to seek clarification and through the advisor’s intervention, the budget funds were attained from the college to support the incentives previously promised to students. Once this monetary challenge was resolved, the focus groups could move forward. In addition, all officers had to adjust work schedules and responsibilities, sacrificing potential income to attend meetings and facilitate the focus groups. We collaborated with the President, VP of Academic Affairs, an IRB reviewer, while working with our advisor, communications, student services, IT Department, the library, and campus directors, to craft the focus groups, enhance the college’s image, and identify student priorities. The next challenge was to organize focus groups to

represent the student voice. The office of the President offered gas cards and catered dining as an incentive for participation. The creativity of the officer team in collaboration with the Communications Director posted a “stall talk” poster with a QR code created by our webmaster (graphic 1) in the restroom stalls and community areas within the college. In addition to this creative method, we had face-to-face conversations and collaborated with instructional technology and the communications team, who spread the word about the focus groups through emails with video content and canvas announcements. The officer's presentation included the results of the focus groups and next steps to address the identified themes. To emphasize the relevance this project has on the strategic plan, the President commented “These responses sit on my desk, and I look at them every day.”



What were the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of this project, including the project's impact on members?

The focus groups were conducted as in-person discussions, on April 17th and 18th of 2023. Both meetings lasted about two hours. The officer team asked thirteen open-ended questions, proctored, and recorded responses in the discussion. There were twenty-two invitation responses, fifteen registered, and eleven attendees. The groups comprised students from five of the thirteen counties in which SSCC students reside. Identified gender representation was 66% female and 33% male. The focus group closely reflects the population at the college of 72% female and 28% male. All campus locations, online, and CCP students were incorporated with students enrolled in seven of the twenty-two programs offered. The diversity of the focus group participants by course location is reflected in graphic two as compared to the college demographics.

Course location graphic here*

The focus groups resulted in extensive qualitative and quantitative data, impacting the college's strategic plan development. In constructing the focus group, information from Instructure's (2021) global survey was utilized to include trends that students, administrators and faculty around the world identified as most important to student success and engagement (nap). Four categories, with thirteen

total open-ended questions were developed utilizing the data from the student survey results. The categories were ranked in importance by student survey results. The priorities include healthy and affordable food options, navigation of online learning, extracurricular activities, and areas of general improvements for student learning experiences. The themes that emerged were: a complete lack of healthy and affordable food easily accessible on campus; improved orientation program; inclusion of more hybrid class options for increased flexibility; special events, activities, and clubs that create a sense of belonging; and designated areas where students can convene and study.

Among the most impactful campus outcomes were the creation of study rooms, the reintroduction of face-to-face orientation, introducing a new medium of communication with students via text, development of a student community room with a microwave, refrigerator, and coffee maker, expedited bathroom renovations to provide students with a more sanitary environment, and extended advising hours during peak times. In addition, a new position was created to combine disability and student services to support student success.



The chapter members were also impacted, given an opportunity to grow in leadership and communication. The members now have a sense of increased value to the college by creating a culture shift that served to embrace collaborative teamwork with leaders and decision-makers to collectively impact the success of all students.

Reference: Instructure. (July, 2021). State of student success and engagement in higher education survey. Retrieved from <https://www.instructure.com/canvas/resources/higher-education/2022-state-of-student-success-engagement-in-highereducation?xyz=&token=AlwxAZtA3VWbWH1hTICMxgfBZh8cLLb24xghTGbieI8>

Describe how this project helped develop and/or hone your chapter's relationship with the college administration. (All rubrics apply, especially Impact Rubric.)

This project helped us grow as leaders. Overcoming fears of public speaking, we confidently facilitated groups and presented to administration, forming bonds, gaining trust, eliminating intimidation, giving us courage, as we represented the voice of all students.

A presentation evaluation to gauge relationship building with administration revealed an overall rating of five on a scale of five. Ratings included enjoyment, value of time investment, and eagerness to work with the chapter for implementation of the focus group findings. Authentic conversations strengthened a culture of teamwork, creating a catalyst for the chapter and administration to synergistically work together. The Dean of Student Services stated, "It is always important to receive feedback from students about what is working and what is not working and suggestions for resolve. We may not always recognize that things need to be improved to gain the most benefit." After receiving personal, handwritten notes from Dr. Roades, we sense that we are creating a movement, one that expands the college's capacity to address hinderances to student success.

To validate this movement, a follow-up meeting was held in October with administration to discuss the actions taken and improvements made based on the focus groups. In addition to the impacts, the College President informed the chapter that the college project helped shape the 2023 college strategic plan which emphasizes relevance and excellence for student success and belonging. This step forward signifies the trust built between administration and the PTK chapter to represent the voice and sentiment of the student body. This has created a shift from the perspective from sole administrative decisions to the global college community. To reinforce this culture shift, the PTK president has been invited by the college president to become a part of the board of trustee's meetings. This expands the partnership of the chapter and administration to the highest level to become the voice of the students and advocate for their success.

Please verify the accuracy of the following information for your chapter's college.

Chapter: Alpha Omicron Eta Chapter College: Southern State Community College Campus: Central Campus City/state: Hillsboro, OH I affirm the above information is correct. (If information is incorrect, please provide updates below.) Yes

Please provide corrected information here. No changes needed

Opt out of consideration for inclusion of your chapter's College Project entry in the next issue of Change Makers: Phi Theta