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Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

THESIS



A Community of Friends: A Proposal for a Supportive
Living Learning Community Centered on Body, Mind,
and Soul

Stefan J. Martyniak

May 2021

A Community of Friends:

A Proposal for a Supportive Living Learning Community Centered on Body, Mind, and Soul

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

By

Stefan J. Martyniak

May 2021

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Dedication

To all those beautiful souls who have endured unimaginable pain.

Acknowledgements

Even though my journey over the past couple of years and throughout much of life has been arduous, turbulent, and sometimes, plagued by periods of downright hopelessness, every person I have met along the way holds a place in my heart, and I would not be where I am without everyone that supported and believed in me when I could no longer stand on my own.

To my parents, who have tried their best to raise me as their only son despite all of the challenges along the way and for doing everything in their power to stand by my side. I thank you and love you so much. And especially to my mother, who stood by my bedside whenever I was sick, stayed up late to help me pass mathematics throughout elementary and middle school, and for cheering me on every Friday for six years when I trained in the martial art of Tang Soo Do. Mom, you have always been so selfless and kind to everyone, and I thank you for everything you have ever done for me.

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follow my heart and do what made me happy. I thank you so much for helping open the door to possibilities I had never considered.

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To Cohort 3, I believe that every single one of you will do amazing things in the future and will be paramount in the transformation of higher education. Each of you have so much to offer, and I am so proud of all the time and effort that went into this thesis project. These two year flew by, but I still have many distinctive memories and fond moments of every single member of the cohort. Despite all of the hardships we have endured over the past year, we made it! Thank you so much for being amazing!

Abstract

This thesis hopes to develop an experimental, multi-themed, Living Learning Community centered on multiple dimensions of college student well-being. These dimensions include the mental, spiritual, environmental, ecological, economic, social, and structural which all impact student success, potential, growth, and satisfaction of students in different ways. This community hopes to expose students to alternative ways of being and living. In this program students will be exposed to a variety of experiential learning opportunities in order to strengthen their awareness of mental health topics and their and ability to advocate for themselves and others in order to seek help. To explore and engage in sustainable practices with an emphasis on intentionality and mindfulness. And to create meaning and purpose in their lives by participating in this community as active citizens. A variety of frameworks, philosophies, and models will be utilized, some of which include, Paulo Freire's problem posing model for education, Althusser's work surrounding ideological reproduction within institutions of power, ecospirituality, ecofeminism, deep ecology, and Southeast Missouri States themed LLC's. Student development theories such as Astin's Student Involvement, and Parks Forms of Community have also influenced the intervention. In order to carry out this program and empower students to join, Astin and Astin's Social Model for Change and Leadership development and Meyerson's concept of the tempered radical will be applied. The overarching goal is to create and maintain a learning environment which is challenging, supportive, holistic, and transformative and a community which has a robust network of resources available to the students.

Keywords: Living Learning Community; Prevention; Ecospirituality; Well-being; Neoliberalism; Suicide; COVID-19

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Chapter One: Positionality

In this project, I will look to explore and implement a multi-themed Living Learning Community (See Appendix A for all terms and definitions) which focuses on mental health awareness, advocacy, and peer support, the exploration and implementation of sustainable practices, and experiential learning opportunities focused on meaning-making, purpose, and spirituality in order to positively impact and enhance college student well-being. According to Applebaum (2006), “Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students in the United States and is preventable. Approximately 1,100 college students die by suicide each year” (p. 914). College students are a vulnerable population for suicidality and mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. Much of this is due to the many stresses and expectations of the college environment coupled with the ongoing stigmatization of mental illness and lack of access to resources. These factors also negatively impact overall student well-being. However, this issue transcends our institutions and is a widespread societal issue as well. Outside of college students, other high-risk populations include members of the trans and queer community, American Indian and Asian populations, veterans, and students with disabilities (Shadick & Akter, 2013). As student affairs professionals, we must do everything we can in order to bring awareness to mental health and suicide in order to further destigmatize discussions and treatment options while also pushing to innovate in order to account for multiple dimensions of student well-being. Despite the significance of mental health treatments and the assessment of pathology, student affairs professionals must use a more holistic lens to enhance student well-being in an attempt to transform their lives and fully unlock their potential.

Our students can also play a prominent role in the well-being of fellow students by

creating a community of friends and a culture of care and accountability. Over the past year, COVID-19 has intensified this issue for students and families alike who attempt to traverse the minefield that is everyday life. Some of these stressors include student debt, financial difficulties, food insecurity, housing, and the pressure to perform and succeed at a collegiate level in a virtual environment. My belief is that each and every life within and outside our institutions is a beautiful gemstone to be protected at all costs. And the positive role that spirituality, sustainability, mental health advocacy, and meaning making through the mode of experiential education can play in providing hope and healing of the mind and body of college students, the campus community, and of our planet cannot be underestimated.

Middle School and High School

From my own educational background and experiences, I can attest to some of the sources of stress and anxiety of college students. For example, my middle school American history class unveiled my burning fear of public speaking when I was assigned to explore the life of former President Lyndon B. Johnson. Crafting the poster piece was challenging yet satisfying, but I could not fathom the idea of muttering and sputtering about in front of my classmates, friends, and teacher. As I endured, the anticipation of hearing my name was killing me. My chest became inflamed and my heart, pounding rapidly, was ready to burst into a million pieces all over my peers and the blank white board. My blue engraved Knight Academy sweater was drenched from every angle possible with tremors escalating and intensifying with every passing moment. I could not understand what was happening to my 13-year-old body, and answers would not reveal themselves until many years later.

As the years passed, I would come to endure similar painful experiences at different points in time. One such moment was during my junior year of high school, as I entered my

first romantic relationship with a close friend of mine, which ended before it truly started. The messy aftermath of this breakup fractured our friendship forever and took a crushing emotional toll on the both of us. A few short weeks later, the woman who I looked up to as the grandmother I never had passed away before I could see her one last time. My rage and anger towards myself and the world began to escalate quickly and culminated in a seething self-hatred. These events sent a shockwave through me and everyone else in my life for a few months, as I was left unable to function. I would show up to my home base dejected and with my head buried deeply into my arms and pressed firmly against the table until my forehead turned red. I did not want to talk to any of my friends and avoided participating at all costs. When the school day ended, I would lodge my cheap Skullcandy earbuds deeply into my large ears to block out the masses of students shuffling about and running to the blacktop in order to board those “stinking yellow buses” as my dad would usually call them. The backseat of the bus always called to me, as if it were reserved for only me. I would look out the window and struggle to keep in the tears that I had collected in my gleaming eyes throughout the day. When my stop arrived, I dragged my legs up the slanted hill to my house. After slamming the creaky wooden door behind me, I would walk past my dad sitting on the computer without acknowledging him on most days. Up the brown stairs with the black ribbed coverings to prevent slippage I went. Turning on my PlayStation 3 the moment I entered my room was a ritual at this point in time. One thing that brought me comfort was my love of The Beatles who provided the soundtrack of my life for over a years’ time. All of my music was accessed on YouTube at this point in my life, as we could not afford any fancy music devices. I would lay down and sink into my bed. Finally, all the tension could be released as I could cry in peace for a couple of hours. I hated existing at this point and it was common for me to picture myself

in scenarios involving my death or hurting myself in some way.

Although, I would never attempt suicide, which is something I am eternally grateful for, my inability to recover pushed my parents to seek out a therapist for me for the first time in my life. Attempting to recall my first of many stints in counseling is an insurmountable challenge and I do not even remember her name, but I would consider her efforts as less of some help to me and more of an annoyance than anything else. My life had improved substantially after a years' time to heal, but my struggles with both Major Depressive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder would resurface and continue.

College

One of my parent's greatest dreams was for me to attend and graduate from college, but I had never taken my studies too seriously and found it to be more of a burden than anything else, as I was only really interested in playing every video game I could get my hands on. As the only child, this certainly heaved immense pressure onto my shoulders. I wanted to make them proud because of all the support they had given me over the years, so I applied to several colleges and was accepted to more than I was expecting. In the end, I chose Faith University, a private Christian college located in Radnor Township. The only problem was, I did not have any sort of idea for a major, so I declared as undecided going into my first year. My dad had always brought up business being a potentially prosperous career path, but I only ever answered him back with an extended, guttural groan. And then one day he asked, "What about psychology?" Never had I considered such a path for myself, but then this was all my jumbled mind could contemplate.

My first semester granted me the opportunity of taking a general psychology course to fulfill a general education requirement. Living in a residence hall was a difficult transition, and

I had challenges in regard to meeting new people outside of my wonderful roommate and childhood friend. Loneliness was a feeling I felt often throughout my first year, but thankfully, I would meet one of the most kind and compassionate professors from the entire university in this course. His love for his students and his critical evaluation and deconstruction of our APA papers and formatting made him quite polarizing at times, but he was the first professor to remember my name and made me feel special and genuinely comfortable with myself.

For my first two years at Faith University the epic battle between business and psychology raged on, I was conflicted, but deep down within my trembling heart, I knew the right path. The director of career services, someone that I would consider a crucial mentor during my journey, would contribute in significant ways towards my development as an individual and helped guide me. She told me to follow my heart and that is exactly what I did. After crying through and failing my midterm exam for Principles of Accounting II, I withdrew from the course and never cared to look back and regret my decision. The psychology department became a home which wrapped its arms around me with pure love and acceptance, and for the first time, I felt like I truly belonged at the university. Being surrounded by other students that understood my experiences and could empathize with me. For the first time, I did not perceive myself as special case or rarity and that my mental illness was a just part of me and did not consume every facet of my identity. The program gave me insight into the void, this cloud so densely populated with doubt, fear, hopelessness, and dread that had infiltrated my soul long ago and has yet to fully cease its control over me. A feeling like “the sickness unto death” (Kierkegaard, 1849/1983, p. 17). A seemingly eternal sinful despair, or sickness of the spirit which follows one every day of their existence. For once, I was truly hopeful about my future, and wanted to fight for my life since I finally

knew what I was fighting against.

That Night

I stormed out of my residence hall as if I were riding the wind in the middle of the pitch- black night with only a handful of lamp lights brightening my way. This argument felt different than all of the others, as he was more visibly shaken than ever before. One spot that comforted him was the pond near the dining hall, so I ran towards it as my sore feet crunched against the gravel pathway, as I felt like all the air was sucked out of my erratic lungs. He was not there.

Confused and stunned, I made my way towards the water wheel and saw someone standing there and looming near the body of water. I approached cautiously, and as he realized me hovering over him, he quickly snapped out his trance. The words that came out of my mouth were not particularly encouraging, as I was shaken to the core by this situation. He seemed to get more upset, as he cried and told me that “I would probably be better off without him.” Those hollow eyes dancing against the moonlight. I will never forget them. Whatever I said in that moment pushed him over the edge, so he ran, more like sprinted towards the pond I initially visited. My soft, chubby body lagging a long distance behind him until he finally stopped like a silent train slamming its breaks. Finally, I had caught up. He refused to talk to me and was particularly anxious. The bench that we sometimes sat on to watch the view was right next to us. I put my hand on him to turn him around, but he refused and kept pulling away from me, inching ever so closer to the water. Suddenly, he came off his feet and attempted to lunge forward. I stumbled and was able to pull his tall, boney body into my arms. He wriggled around until I wrestled him to the ground with what little strength I had. He shoved me off and continued to run from me towards the outer bounds of the university’s

campus. I pulled my iPhone 6s out of my worn pocket and dialed a friend. No answer. And another friend, but still with no answer. I knew that I had to resort to calling campus security, as I continued to run after him and as I began dialing, he stopped. A light was approaching from the path leftward, and there was campus security pulling up in their vehicle just when we needed them. An older gentleman asked, “Is everything okay?” And I responded with a hushed yet winded “no, things are not okay.” From there campus security was able to get ahold of our Resident Director, and she drove us to the nearest hospital since neither of us had a car on campus at this point.

In the moment relief and worry began to slowly drift away from the both of us. At the hospital, he was taken in for a psychiatric evaluation, and was kept overnight for further monitoring. I talked with both his mom and dad over the phone about what had happened, and they revealed to me that something similar to this occurred before. My friend asked me to stay in the hospital overnight, so I propped myself up against a chair, and talked with him until we both drifted off into the dreamworld. He was admitted to the psychiatric unit for inpatient care for about two weeks until he was cleared to come back on campus. Family, friends, and I visited him during this time. Without him on campus, I reflected on how poorly I responded to this situation of crisis. Being consumed by a state of panic, having no one to turn to for help. This could have been handled so much better, but I was completely clueless. From then on, I knew that neither of our lives would ever be the same and that him and I would continue to crystallize the unbreakable bond we had forged. The trajectory of my future was forever transformed after this moment in time.

The Past Year

The end of 2019 ended with me having a significant surgical procedure called a

urethroplasty which made my winter break torturous. I was still hopeful with what 2020 would bring and was excited for the spring semester at Golden University to finally commence. Towards the end of February, I attended a Mental Health First Aid training seminar which lasted eight hours on a Friday. One of the most important takeaways was learning how to identify someone that might be at risk of suicide and the steps to take when confronting them. Had I learned about this during my junior year at Faith university, I would have been more equipped to handle the suicidal ideation and attempt of my friend. Despite the intense challenges that 2020 brought, from having to get two more surgeries, going through a break-up, doing degree online and attempting to live at home in isolation, I persevered. During the late summer months, I was formally diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and later Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) after deciding to finally see a psychiatrist who would also prescribe me two antidepressants alongside the weekly therapy I was already attending. Despite all this, I somehow survived. But many did not.

During the year, I made three new friends and reconnected with another with all of them having a history of suicidal ideation, behavior, and self-harming tendencies. All of them in college or having just recently graduated. Deep inside my bones, heart, and mind I truly began to realize just how much of a colossal issue suicide, self-harm, and mental illness was for both college and non-college students. This set a fire deep within me and made me feel as if I truly had a purpose. My thematic concern finally began to take shape as I fixated on researching more about college student suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention which eventually led me to where I am now with a focus on well-being.

Consequently, the past year sparked a love for nature and the environment due to

significant periods of quarantine because of my waning health and the pandemic. The ability to walk was taken away for large periods of last year and this was one of the few activities that brought me any joy, so it was especially crushing to abstain from which brought my blood to a boiling point. Once my health improved and COVID-19 guidelines became more flexible, I was able to walk again almost as I had before. The sustainable campus course from last semester also brought my awareness to a number of issues such as climate change, deforestation, and the negative impact that waste has on individuals, communities, societies, and all of the non-human beings that occupy space on the planet.

My intervention would evolve into a retreat in order to regain some of what was lost due to the pandemic. My exposure to ecospirituality, ecofeminism, and deep ecology would help to bolster my knowledge with theoretical frameworks which would bring me a greater awareness of the intersections of social, environmental, and economic levels and furthering transformative change without sacrificing one of these dimensions. My attendance for the sustainability research seminar series would also contribute to my progress, as I learned about transition towns and deforestation which I found to be especially fascinating. This would motivate me to make small, conscious decisions and changes in my personal life like no longer using plastic utensils, turning off the water when it is flowing, not using paper, recycling more mindfully, and incorporating more organic and local foods into my diet. And with this, I believe that living a more sustainable life will eventually bring with it a much happier life.

Thesis Preview

Chapter Two will include theoretical frameworks like, Naess's (1973) deep ecology, d'Eaubonne's (1974), Li (2007), and Gaard's (2011) contributions to ecofeminism, and Berry's (1987) and van Schalkwyk's contributions towards ecospirituality. Astin's Student

Involvement Theory (1984) and Parks Forms of Community (2000) will also provide a lens focused on the inclusion of student identity development. All of these frameworks will help to further clarify and open up the conversations surrounding college student spiritual development and well-being by exploring the impact of a dynamic living learning community as the center of exploring identity, meaning, purpose, discussions related to well-being and mental health, and the implementation of sustainable practices into the lives of these students through experiential learning opportunities. My philosophy of education and critical action research plan will also be contained within chapter two much of which will be focused on Althusser's (1970, 2014) theories surrounding ideology, Freire's (1970) problem posing model and ecopedagogy, and Derrida's (2002) vision for the future of the university.

Chapter Three will include a significant exploration of the history of college student suicide and origins, the development and effectiveness of prevention, intervention, and post-vention programs, trainings, and counseling and psychological services. The argument of spirituality as a possible protective factor for students at a high-risk of suicide will also be evaluated. There will also be a deep dive into what spirituality can look like for individuals, and how experimenting with ecospirituality can help promote the well-being of college students and the significance and potential of Living Learning Communities. In the hopes of sparking an initiative for students to explore implementing sustainable practices into their personal and communal lives and engaging in community-based activism with the intent of resisting and struggling against predominant ideologies like Neoliberalism.

Chapters Four and Five include the design, implementation, evaluation, and limitations of my intervention which hopes to establish an on-campus Living Learning Community for students in order to provide an alternative living space which is focused on

sustainable practices, community centered learning initiatives, mental health awareness and advocacy, spiritual development, creative expression, and social impact.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks

Forging a philosophy of education is a daunting task and several factors must be taken to account when doing so. The fact that we as humans are ever-changing beings means that our way of teaching and educating is also adapting and changing to the times. However, we must never forget where we came from, as the seeds of the past are conjoined with the outcomes of the future. It is exceedingly important to be able to create a space or environment that helps to harness the highest degree of intellectual freedom and personal development for students. I consider myself to be a developer and have always enjoyed supporting people, or in this case students who struggle with finding themselves and securing somewhat of a place in this scary and chaotic world. Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation can be brought to the surface because of significant isolation and lack of belongingness as well as trauma and crisis within and around an individual and the unknown and unpredictable nature of the college campus can bring about much stress and difficulty all of which contribute to harming the well-being of college students.

The concept of living through the everyday struggles of being a human is truly underappreciated. Death, violence, sickness, trauma, loneliness, and relational breakdowns are just a few struggles that may plague college students. However, it should also be recognized that the structures and institutions of society as a whole also play a part in oppression, degradation of well-being, and sickness of the body and mind. Attempting to obtain a pure sense of freedom can feel unattainable because of these factors. The will to live, a concept developed by Schopenhauer (1819/1966) is an incredible force, but in some instances, the external and the internal worlds come to disrupt the human in a way that causes it to fade from existence. My intention is to help college students create their own sense of meaning and purpose, with an emphasis on both their

thinking and feeling selves. With this project, one of my goals is to explore the role that ecospirituality can play in improving the lives of college students grappling with illnesses of the mind or a sickness of the spirit. Ecospirituality acts as an overarching center point for ecofeminism, deep ecology, and environmental ethics. However, the meaning, or definition is more open to interpretation. Lincoln (2000) refers to ecospirituality as “a manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment” (p. 228). Essentially, this can also be seen as a collision between the ecological and spiritual words in an attempt to bring harmony for all beings that occupy a space. Thus, ecospirituality can represent a means for bringing the individual and collective desires of college students and professionals together to bring about radical change in our institutions which can eventually permeate into society.

Astin’s Student Involvement Theory

Astin (1984) as cited in Patton et al., (2016) defines involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). A focus on student behaviors and the actions as well as the energy and investment towards co-curricular experiences are a centerpiece in the learning and development process (Astin, 1984, as cited in Patton et al., 2016). Involvement and social connection are universally agreed upon as being paramount to student development, learning, and success. Without support and a sense of belonging in the community, students can become isolated, hopeless, and can lack a sense of meaning or mission in their lives at the time which can impact physical and mental health along with overall well-being and a student’s ability to succeed academically and socially. My intervention of a Living Learning Community includes a variety of opportunities for student residents to become involved on the micro and macro levels, as one of my hopes is for them to

take what they learned from the program and take the initiative in terms of implementing and sharing with the campus community and wherever the journey of life may take them.

Park's Forms of Community Theory

Park's (2000) notes the positive impact that a familiar and dependable community can have in the exploration of student identity (Patton et al., 2016). Her theory was split into five different types of communities that could be applied to different time periods in an individual's lifespan development. These five forms include, Conventional, Diffuse, Mentoring, Self-selected, and Open to the other (Parks, 2000, as cited in Patton et al., 2016). When taking into the account the vision for the community which encompasses my intervention, it is challenging to place and relate it to only one of the five forms. Some elements of a mentorship community would be relevant as collaboration with student residents, workers, and professionals are encouraged and tested in countless ways. For some students, this community could be their first major step towards independence, identity formation, and self-actualization. However, an LLC of this type could have the qualities of a self-selected group as students are aware of some of what to expect prior to beginning the program, so they may join in order to meet like-minded individuals with similar values. And yet, this environment could be more open to the other for some students as a challenge to their philosophy of life, ideologies, values, and identity. They may be seeking out a different experience in order to immerse themselves amongst individuals who are seeking a different purpose. Parks (2000) forms of community are especially helpful even though I find the categorization to be open to interpretation which can cause an individual to become a bit confused as to what type of community they are immersed in since there is some overlap between all five forms.

Experiential Education

One man that truly awakened my mind to the possibilities that education could provide was Paulo Freire. In his landmark achievement *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) defines the banking model of education as, "...the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator" (p. 56). In contrast, Freire's the problem posing model as, "...affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming" (p. 65). Freire's harsh critiques of the banking model expose the passivity and conformity that this pedagogical tool has demonstrated. In contrast, a problem posing model is active, engaging, and allows for individual students' experiences to penetrate the classroom. This approach allows for a critical learning environment which is more collaborative, democratic, and liberatory.

Ultimately, helping to engage and bonds students and staff to one another can help to bridge the gap between society and higher education, as the political and social realms are allowed to bleed into our classrooms and spaces rather than being transfixed on dominant modes of pedagogy and ideology which can be quite authoritarian in nature. This allows for an analysis and deconstruction of the greatest problems that plague our world by confiding with others and fusing the collective minds with both those that are likeminded and disagreeable in order to produce new knowledge and even come to some sort of impasse or conclusion which can ultimately lead to practical solutions that lead to transformative change.

Additionally, another crucial contribution of Freire's revolves around the concept of eco pedagogy. Freire (1970) insisted that the earth be included when speaking about oppressed entities. The human-caused degradation and subjugation of nature reflects upon humanity as our planet has sustained significant damage over the course of history just as we have sabotaged

ourselves in the name of greed. Climate change, global warming and the debasement of biodiversity is the centerpiece to many issues which directly impact not just college students but every individual occupying a space on Earth. Wallace-Wells (2019) describes what our planet has faced and has yet to face:

The earth has experienced five mass extinctions before the one we are living through now, each so complete at wiping of the fossil record that it functioned as an evolutionary reset, the planet's phylogenetic tree first expanding, then collapsing, at intervals, like a lung: 86 percent of all species dead, 450 million years ago; 70 million years later, 75 percent; 125 million years later, 96 percent; 50 million years later, 80 percent; 135 million years after that, 75 percent again. (p. 1)

In essence, four of these five mass extinctions occurred due to climate change and global warming at the hands of greenhouse gasses. The sights of society are in locked in on expansion, production, and the ultimate destruction of this planet and the life that inhabits it. The collapse of the planet will result in the collapse of humanity, or an Earth that is entirely unrecognizable. Gadotti (2011) advocates for the potential value of ecopedagogy by viewing it as, “. . . a chance for education to renew its old systems, based on competitive principles and values. Introducing a culture of sustainability and peace into school communities is essential so that these communities can be more cooperative and less competitive” (p. 22). Experiential forms of learning like ecopedagogy could provide meaningful inspiration for students looking to make a difference in their communities and beyond. Collective action and activism are key when it comes to the transformation of society for the betterment of all living beings on our planet. College students represent one of the greatest hopes for reimagining a more equitable, just, free, and peaceful

world. One where we live with the earth and respect the earth and its ecosystems instead of dominating and exploiting it.

Ecospirituality, Ecofeminism, and Deep Ecology

In the case of Berry (1987) and his theory of functional cosmology, the second principle states:

The universe is a unity and interacting and genetically related community of beings bound together in an inseparable relationship in space and time. The unity of the planet earth is especially clear; each being of the planet is profoundly implicated in the existence and functioning of every other being in the universe. (p. 66)

Much of Berry's work focuses on the creation, origins, and evolution of the universe as well as how all beings created on the planet Earth interact as subjects. This theoretical perspective comes from a wide-gazing scope which takes into account the wholeness of the universe and everything that fills it. This sense of harmony and balance between the human and non-human can be extracted. So much emphasis has been put on the needs of humanity, but humanity has not fulfilled the needs of every living person as so many still exist while barely living. This overindulgence in part of consumption and greed is a disease in which humanity must take part in reversing in order to avoid major future crises coming to fruition. Bringing greater consciousness to the effect we have on every living being that we come into contact with would be a step in slowing down and living with the mind open instead of rushing with a mind nearly or entirely closed.

In addition to ecospirituality, ecofeminism can also play a prominent role in guiding the development of college students. d'Eaubonne (1974) describes the prominent role that women play in solving the major ecological and environmental crises of the time. Ecofeminism seeks to

analyze the connection between gender and nature by dissecting the impact that multiple systems of oppression have on identity (Li, 2007). Through this lens women are placed alongside nature as being oppressed at the hands of a patriarchal, capitalistic society which defines the culture and seeks to dominate and exploit both nature and women (Li, 2007). The goal of ecofeminism is to create a more egalitarian and free society in which nature and women are both admired and respected for their unique perspectives and are encouraged to participate in environmental activism. Engagement with ecofeminism could inspire college students and especially those that have been historically marginalized to take part in shaping a future that is more sustainable for all beings that inhabit this planet. In essence, establishing a spiritual connection to nature which allows for the acknowledgement of our humanities past failures in order to progress towards building a future that is more inclusive, free, equitable, and just.

Additionally, Naess (1973) and his theories surrounding deep ecology bring a unique perspective surrounding the relationship between beings in an ecosystem. He contrasts shallow and deep ecology in order to display the complexities of this philosophy. Deep ecology focuses on “diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness” (Naess, 1973, p. 1). He believes that identifying the root causes of environmental and ecological peril and solving them is more effective than just managing symptoms and avoiding the actual cause. In the present state of the world, which is hierarchical in nature, it can be difficult to imagine what all of this would look like. Simultaneously, this puts an emphasis on the value and uniqueness of every being in an environment whether they be human or not. This reinforces the development of respect and admiration for all life rather than prioritizing one over another. For some, this view of the world could be either liberating or more constricting than individually intended. We have been integrated and assimilated into the western, neoliberal

capitalist society to the point of it being habitual, so attempting to change the world to fit this sort of a model could feel like a helpless endeavor. Theories like this one are especially helpful in challenging what we know and what is right. There are so many possibilities and philosophies for living life which produce a dizzying yet exciting effect.

And finally, van Schalkwyk's (2011) emphasis on sacredness in the context of liberation theology and ecospirituality. Sacredness can be defined as, "the sense of something being worthy of devotion and reverence or something being of ultimate value" (van Schalkwyk, 2011). In this case the relationship between God, and all living and non-living beings are considered to be of the greatest value when taking this angular lens of ecospirituality. Bridging the scientific and religious divide is an arduous task but seems to be crucial in terms of transforming the planet we live on in a way that is focused on the cosmological connectedness of all living beings. Van Schalkwyk (2011) gathers that the well-being of a person is characterized by an energetic flow within the "ecology" or the holistic interconnectedness of one's own soul, body and mind.

When taking into account our present state of being within society, this direct connection and flow between all beings amongst all ecosystems has been significantly disrupted if not entirely destroyed. With human needs and desires put at the forefront, there is at times little consideration in terms of the repercussions that human action has on all other beings that occupy a space on this planet. Due to this concentration on hyper individualism rather than collectivism, humans have little interest in picking each other up when clouded by an ideology like neoliberalism. If a greater awareness and initiative was made in reestablishing these connections with each other, eventually this could be translated to all other beings in the planet. Recreating these ecological bonds could help humanity take its first steps in a direction which would provide greater stability and in turn bolstering the overall wellness of all beings.

The Future of the University

Another major theorist who is relevant to this discussion is Jacques Derrida. In *The University Without Condition*, Derrida (2002) mentions that “This university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an unconditional freedom to question and to assert, or even the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the truth (p. 11).” He essentially analyzes the modern standard of higher education institutions which have become conditional in nature. In so doing, he attempts to utilize deconstruction in order to create a vision for the future of universities which have no conditions or limiters placed on them. The current state of the university is one that is home to the battlegrounds of ideology. Each of these ideologies can exert a powerful sway in determining the direction of the university.

One of the most detrimental ideologies to the progress of institutions of higher learning is neoliberalism. Giroux (2004) describes this socioeconomic theory as one that prevents government intervention of the free market and reinforces the value and influence of the material above all while also gutting support of public goods. This places profit at the center of higher education and many other institutions, which can shackle the influence of intrinsic and holistic value. Much of Derrida’s work focuses on allowing for new or different knowledge to be brought to the surface by acknowledging the privileging of certain ideas throughout history running rampant due to the establishment of hierarchies. He highlights the humanities role in being able to shift the vision of the university to one that follows through with what it preaches. Claiming academic freedom while actually following through with crafting a system that allows for unconditional freedom is what is needed, and Derrida notes the modern-day universities

conflictions and contradictions when it comes to what universities are claimed to be as opposed to what they actually are.

Ideological Reproduction

Another influential theorist, and philosopher of education and society, is Louis Althusser. Much of his scholarly work has focused on the concept of ideology and the reproduction of it within a capitalistic society. Althusser et al. (2014) states that “Ideology represents of individuals’ imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence” (181). In this sense, the concept of ideology seems to represent a mask of illusion, a veil which distorts actual reality, by which an individual’s interpretations become a false reality when compared to the actual conditions of existence. This illusion can be especially threatening because the more widespread an ideology is, the less of a grasp on reality can be had, and the less of a chance there is to break out of that illusory prison which wants us to adhere to it and be subjugated by it.

If one could credit Althusser with one specific achievement, then it is giving a generation of scholars an accessible opening to the Marxist strands of thought. Still, his scholarship and contributions did fall out of favor with many academics after a psychotic breakdown led to the suffocation and murder of his wife, H el ene Rytmann (Seymour, 2017). This is an important fact to acknowledge as this is a tragic event and cannot be entirely separated from Althusser’s identity. However, to discredit all of his monumental work prior to this incident would be a bit rash. Through an Althusserian theoretical lens, ideology is seemingly eternal and present no matter what direction we look in by taking a materialistic and concrete existence. Althusser et al. (2014) also mentions how “ideology has a material existence,” and “has no history” (184, 174). Through this lens of thought, ideology is inevitable, eternal, and occupies every aspect of human existence. As a concept it is invisible in nature and difficult to pin down, but ideologies can be

materialized when related to major institutions like the church, school, workplace, and even our homes, as dominant ideologies and less prominent ones are being peddled to us without our conscious awareness.

Exploring further into the depths of neoliberalism helps to form a clearer picture as to how ideology functions. Realizing the stranglehold that neoliberalism, capitalism, return on investment, the markets and competition hold over our higher education institutions and much of our planet can be quite the shock. Institutions like the schools, colleges, churches, the family, hospitals, prisons, and many more have been infiltrated by this ideology over the course of the past few decades where the emphasis on profit has spiraled out of control. Ideology is meant to create a veil or façade over society which corrupts the ability to perceive the truth or what is actually going on in the environment around us. This first step of identification is prominent in terms of being able to challenge these ideologies and meta-narratives which have gutted intrinsic value and put a spotlight on material value above everything else.

When looking at the university through an Althusserian lens, the mechanisms of ideology can be seen everywhere. Althusser (1970) divides social institutions or state ideological apparatuses into two categories: Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) in which both attempt, rather successfully, to reproduce dominant ideologies (p. 66). The university would be thrown into the category of the ISA as it reproduces ideologies in a stealthy way rather than using violence or other extreme measures in order to keep the flow of ideology like the RSA would. On the surface, it seems like resisting against a dominant ideology is futile, and it surely would be in the sense of attacking an RSA where in most cases they cannot be convinced or have resources way outside of our bounds. An ISA like the university allows for some space to pull from other ideologies and modes of thought even

when being consumed by a dominant ideology like neoliberalism. Resources like the library provide other alternatives where each and every book on that shelf oozes some sort of ideological allegiance many of which have presented preestablished historical challenges to normativity or have the blueprints for imagining and creating new ideologies and possibilities. Some would consider higher education institutions to be “the marketplace of ideas”, but I see it as more of an ideological war that continues to rage throughout the ages.

Alongside ecofeminism, ecospirituality seeks to challenge predominant neoliberal and capitalistic ideologies to allow an opportunity to envision a different kind of world. These concepts help to empower students to participate in activism centered on a more sustainable future on an individual and structural levels in order to transform our societies in a direction that takes all life on this planet into account. This neoliberal model has damaged society, humanity, and in turn, caused us to forget what it truly means to be human. As an awareness has been brought to this systemic injustice, now something must be done about it.

In summation, ecospirituality provides an alternative perspective for college students to interact with their environments by creating a sense of meaning for themselves and making connections with a community in order to advocate for collective action. Essentially, seeking to transform individual lives through mindful personal choices which are more conscious of the ecological and environmental structures around us by taking more of a holistic approach towards treating students that are, for example, at a high risk of suicide. This exploration of spiritual identity in combination with an emphasis on the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of society will ultimately allow for the needs of all people to be met which will help to unlock their true potential.

Critical Action Research Statement

The idea of utilizing another theoretical framework in order to tackle my thematic concern is difficult to imagine. Reason and Bradbury (2001) as cited in Bryndon and Miller (2003) described action research as:

A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 1)

In summation, critical action research introduces a much-welcomed challenge to traditional modes like that of positivism. One of my personal greatest critiques of something like positivism is how far removed the researcher is from the trenches of the process in an attempt to play the role of an objective overlord which can seem quite authoritarian by design. Action research allows for someone like me to become part of the process alongside those who I have welcomed to embark on this journey with me. Every individual has something unique and meaningful to offer, whether a thought, words of encouragement, or speaking through action. An advanced degree should not put me on a pedestal as the arbiter of truth. My perspective is one that attempts to embrace and understand the values, beliefs, perspectives, and positionality of others even if it is incongruent to who I am and what I stand for. This diversity in opinion can be challenging to grapple with, but I am confident that every person I come into contact with can teach me or enlighten me towards possibilities that I may have not considered or even been aware of. This

way of tackling education seems to portray an essence of constructivism which I can certainly appreciate.

As someone that is especially chaotic and messy in the way of lifestyle this sort of research methodology really does call to me. The lack of structure and encouragement of engaging in a process that may or may not provide intended results can seem deflating. However, an action research project allows for so much growth of oneself and the self that interacts with others. To elaborate on this, I simply mean that change is inevitable and the development of one individual and their interactions with another individual will allow for a greater degree of change. If an action research project involved only one person, there would be severe limitations on the possibilities of development and learning. If the environment is occupied by twenty, thirty, or fifty individuals or more, it may be especially messy and difficult to control the situation, but it would be a fresh breath of air for everyone involved in terms of taking in all that is proposed and offered.

When it comes to choosing what type of action research to utilize, this can certainly become a frustrating process. Stringer (2007) distinguishes participatory and practical action research and highlights the importance of choosing one over the other. In my case, with such a novel idea for an intervention, I could imagine taking from both of these approaches. In reality, the participatory mode of action research focuses more on prevalent social issues and the bigger picture in the hopes of being able to incite change that is beneficial for my population of interest. Practical action research is focusing on an extremely specific issue and how it can be fixed and seems to be quite narrow in terms of the overall vision (Stringer, 2007, as cited in Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Participatory action research has its metaphorical eyes more open to the community and social crises of our time and the purpose is to empower and help the individuals

and the institutions improve in whatever way possible and needed (Stringer, 2007, as cited in Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Practical action research attempts to work within the constraints of the systems and structures in place while participatory action research attempts to seriously challenge those systems and structures by working to restructure or revolutionize in order to target the root of the issue rather than managing the symptoms.

The process of action research is ongoing and can continue to evolve and take shape over time in whatever way it must. This is all an active and raw succession of events and embracing how “messy” the study can be is a large reason for continuing and attempting to improve and mold the intervention over time in order to adapt to the people being directly impacted within this community and environment (Bryndon & Miller, 2003). Stringer’s (2007) interacting spirals, which include, looking, thinking, and acting are one way of maneuvering through the action research process. Our eyes are amongst one of our greatest resources, but in a world where we are constantly on the move with our attention focused elsewhere it can be difficult to identify problems, challenges, and crises around us (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). When we truly take the time perceive the world around us, so much can be revealed. I view this process of looking, thinking, and acting as a process that may never truly end, but that is part of the excitement. The power of keeping our action research study alive and breathing through time or putting the bookends in it and placing it on the shelf for someone else to rediscover at a later date.

A crucial piece of action research is the emphasis on the critical aspect towards conducting studies or developing interventions. Horkheimer (1972) as cited in Kemmis (2008) stated that critical theory, “Has no specific influence on its side, except concern for the abolition of injustice... its own nature... turns it towards a changing of history and the establishment of justice” (pp. 242-243). One way to look at critical theory is an examination of historical, social,

and cultural contexts in order to identify various flaws, fallacies, and imperfections. Humanity has failed as many times as it has succeeded and all that has happened throughout history has brought us to this specific place in time. Nothing is free of examination, but this tool is one of the most frightening of all because it can trigger a critical analysis of ourselves and all of the ideological constructs which have influenced us whether for right or wrong. What we may have believed to be just may be brought into the view of a source of injustice which can instill a sense of identity crisis and collapse.

Habermas (1984, 1987a, 1987b) identifies the importance of communicative action within the process and framework of action research through the use of ‘intersubjective agreement’, ‘mutual understanding’, and ‘unforced consensus’” (as cited in Kemmis 2008). As important as self-reflection is within the learning process and journey through change, collaboration is one of the most essential components of critical action research. So much knowledge and opportunities for attaining them would be especially limited without these organic and sometimes chaotic interactions. Of course, we can look towards books and articles for knowledge which has a firm place within the research process, but we must also take into account verbal contributions in the heat of the moment. The manifestation of these thoughts projected outwardly towards the other participants in the action research process allows for the clash and community for many different ideas which propels the learning process forward within a space with less constraining parameters as with a positivistic study or experiment. The difficulties with actively listening to others speak, is especially important when we do not come to an agreement of terms with their ideology and values system. This sort of opportunity or challenge to our sense of being and self can allow for some of the greatest knowledge to surface.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The history of mental illness and suicidality can be traced back for several hundred years when positioned and focused on a societal level. In Foucault's (1988) masterwork, *Madness and Civilization*, he writes a detailed account on the leprosariums and lazar houses of the middle ages and how they were used to isolate and confine individuals of society. When the disease of leprosy was eradicated, these empty, abandoned institutions were used to house the mad, insane, delusional, strange, and criminal in an attempt to morally conduct and control the behavior of these individuals, so they could become rational and reasonable beings. This connection immediately leads to the main concern at hand, and that is the origins and evolution of college student suicide over the past century, and the changes of perspective and establishment of prevention and therapeutic services. At its outset, suicide on campuses was downplayed and cast behind a veil of darkness because of the negative impact it could have on the image and reputations of universities (Brown, 2014). The reality is that suicidality and mental illness have always been an issue on college campuses, but as time has passed, higher education institutions have opened their eyes to acknowledging, understanding, and treating struggling students in immense strides over the past 100 years.

The History

Studies related to suicide and how it is impacted by social, individual, and emotional factors go all the way back to the late-19th century with the sociological perspective developed by Emile Durkheim (1897/1951) within his book, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Recognizing Durkheim's role in fusing sociological theory and empirical evaluation are to be noted as well as his argument for the influence of social context on suicide. Durkheim's studies opened up the possibilities for exploring suicidal behavior and risk factors. Despite his contributions, the

journey begins in the year 1927 when media headlines were blindsided by the 20 confirmed deaths of college students by suicide (Cavan, 1928). This was an immense local shock at the time, but Cavan (1928), who conducted a study at the time, found that these deaths were not out of the ordinary and reflected a proportional standard of national suicide rates. My decision to start in this point in time is due to the impact that this event had on the media and society. It was viewed as an “epidemic” of sorts even though it was only twenty people (Cavan, 1928). I would consider this moment to be the inciting action to my historical retelling as this event set the course for everything that came after. This incident brought the issue of student suicide ever so slightly into the open.

Soon after, a 1931 conference dedicated to the implementation of mental hygiene programs showed that universities were beginning to commit themselves to assisting students that were struggling with psychotic or personality related disorders (Kraft, 2011). In 1934, five more students took their lives on the University of Michigan’s campus which prompted another study which focused on the individual campus as opposed to society at large (Raphael et al., 1937). Reasons and pressures of suicide were explored but there were no answers in terms of prevention methods. As these student deaths continued to slowly pile up, more efforts were made in understanding the causes, signs, and risk factors associated with suicide. One of the major risk factors linked to suicidal is the onset of depression which can lead to exhibiting symptoms, such as social isolation, hopelessness, loneliness, and suicidal ideation (Westefeld et al., 2006). The emphasis and studies related to student suicidality ceased during the years of the 2nd World War and Korean War and resurfaced in immense waves throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Slimak, 1990). War and international conflict always seem to bring about some of the greatest sources of change despite all of the terrors and errors of just about any war throughout history, as the 1960’s

became a source of counterculture and rebellion on college campuses and throughout society, by employing some much-needed challenges to the systems in place.

Several strides were made in continuing to study and understand the causes and the function of suicidal ideation and behavior. However, many college administrators were hesitant in acknowledging just how critical of an issue suicide was in the scope of the university. Hendrickson's and Cameron's (1975) study highlighted the disparity in college deans' perceptions on suicide and the actual reality of the matter. Overarching change is not going to occur if the people in charge of a university cannot access or come to terms with specific issues which are of a controversial or sensitive nature, which includes suicide. The 1960s saw an increased expansion of counseling and mental health services with more psychologists and counselors being brought into the fray as opposed to just a limited number of psychiatrists (Hendrickson & Cameron, 1975). This expansion was partly due to the creation and funding of the GI bill (Kraft, 2011), which allowed for greater access to veterans of previous wars and dramatically increased the number of students enrolling in colleges and universities around the nation. Students also became involved in providing peer counseling and mentor services even relating to drug, alcohol, and substance abuse services in order to challenge the established professional counseling centers on campus (Kraft, 2011).

Soon enough, psychiatric and counseling services would merge during the 70s and become the standard for universities nationwide. With the student and professional services came a greater acceptance of mental health and psychologically related issues. Still, student suicide was peering from the outside in and still felt somewhat excluded from the developing narrative. In 1970, the *Counseling Center in Higher Education* (Gallagher & Demos, 1970) itself only included a few paragraphs detailing how to manage crises related to college student suicide and

this was primarily directed towards training resident assistants. By the end of the decade several suicide prevention and crisis facilities were established alongside the *National Institute of Mental Health* which further expanded on the studies of suicide while also helping to educate students and faculty on how to approach crisis situations involving suicide (Seiden, 1971, as cited in Brown, 2014). The *American Association of Suicidology* would also be established to help combat suicide on college campuses (Hoffer, 1973; Whitaker and Slimak, 1990, as cited in Brown, 2014). At the start of the 1970s, only 66 counseling and psychiatric centers were established across the country on college and university campuses (Grollman, 1971, as cited in Brown, 2014). Considerable progress was made during these two decades in studying suicide and expanding upon services, but there was still much needed in order to further expand resources in order to make them normative, accessible, and free of stigma and intense scrutiny.

In 1978, a documentary named *College Can Be Killing* was broadcast on the PBS channel, which grasped the attention of colleges nationwide and the media as well (Brown, 2014). It followed the death of a Northwestern University student and the campus communities' reactions to the tragedy. This documentary was increasingly divisive among the collegiate community, and despite the great information it gave, it pitted institutions against each other and exposed those that were not doing enough in order to provide students with services that they deserved and even desperately needed (Rickgarn, 1994). In addition, many more articles were released in terms of designing strategies that would allow for all members of the campus community to become involved in the effort to prevent suicide, but still many institutions were slow in implementing these sorts of programs if at all (Heinrichs, 1980; Kraft, 1980; Schwartz 1980; Wright et al, 1984, as cited in Brown, 2014). In 1983, the pieces were coming together for an update of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Psychiatric Disorders* (DSM IV) in which

was more inclusive for students and provided categories for different types of psychological conditions which could develop during a student's time at their institution of choice (Kraft, 2011). Jacobs and Towns (1984) alongside Charles and Eddy (1987) proposed the implementation of grief training programs for residence hall staff. This called for the establishment of "a comprehensive program designed to sensitize and prepare student personnel professionals, residential living staff, paraprofessionals, faculty, and the general student population to prevent suicide and to recognize and react to potentially suicidal students" (Wright et al., 62). More and more strides in research continued to be uncovered during the 1980s and 1990s, but it took increasing amounts of time for colleges to move towards practically implementing methods and strategies as well as creating policies surrounding suicide prevention and intervention. The late 1980s saw the emergence of postvention methods including the removal of students that had attempted suicide from campus in order to protect them and other individuals (Sherill, 1989, as cited in Brown, 2014). This came with some backlash and controversy over legal and liability related challenges which focused in on student confidentiality and safety (Yarris, 1996, as cited in Brown, 2014).

As the 1990s came into full swing, research in terms of suicide had reached its peak. One of the major discoveries during this time was that suicide was still not increasing exponentially and was proportional in terms of national suicide rates. Research also suggested that the greatest strategy for reducing college student suicide even further would be through means of identifying and referring at risk individuals to consult counseling and psychological services which were proving to be affective (Schwartz, 2006). Due to the limitations of the survey data, it would not be advisable to conclude that student suicide rates were declining (Schwartz, 2006). It is unlikely to reach every student in the country and this is merely an observation of patterns over time

rather than a conclusive matter in which it is safe to say that suicide rates will continue to decline for the rest of time to the point of suicidal extinction. A greater awareness of suicide on college campuses which garnered greater support for taking greater safety measures increased, as M. Silverman, director of Student Counseling and Resource Service at the University of Chicago, stated a “significant destigmatization of mental health problems by American society in the late 20th Century led to improvement in awareness and acceptance of the issue of suicide on campus (Brown, 2014).” From here suicide continued to become uncovered by those impassioned by the issue, ultimately, society and higher education became more accepting and cognizant of the it and were more willing to invest on behalf of the student in terms of identifying, preventing, and treating mental illness.

After the turn of the century, the *Center for Collegiate Mental Health* collaborated with over 200 counseling centers across the country in order to develop a survey which would help identify and access college students at risk of suicide (CCMH, 2013b). Some of the questions included were, “Have you purposely injured yourself without suicidal intent,” “Have you seriously considered attempting suicide,” and “Have you made a suicide attempt (Brown, 2014).” Direct questions are one of the most effective strategies for assessing if someone is considering suicide. It may seem counterintuitive and terrifying, but it has been proven to be among the most effective forms of crisis intervention. Throughout the 2000s, higher education institutions grappled with the issues of privacy and reporting of incidents related to suicide and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy act (FERPA) and laws in which information could be disclosed to proper parties during situations constituted as an emergency (Kalchthalaer, 2010). Twenty-three student suicides at Cornell University between 1990 and 2003 caused a great backlash towards the university and forced their hand for implementing greater modes of

prevention (Marchell, 2011). This soon came with the signing of the *Garret Lee Smith Memorial Act* which provided grant funding of \$82 million in order to fund educational seminars, the national suicide prevention hotline, and a variety of different training programs which by 2013, were used by 82 institutions of higher education (Goldston et al., 2010).

Despite all of the amazing progress in the past few decades, suicide is still the second leading cause of death amongst college students, as approximately 1,100 college students take their lives every year (Applebaum, 2006). One of many factors that deserves notice is that students seem to lack access to services such as counseling or psychiatry on college campuses due to a lack of financial resources, difficulty of service delivery, stigmatization, and societal misconceptions of the mentally ill (National Mental Health Association, 2010). The social connectedness piece is crucial in all of this. We can have all of the services possible, but if students are not using them as much as they could be, alternative options, revolving around the preventative nature could be established and utilized in order to act as a first step towards treatment of their mental illnesses.

After taking a close look at the history of college student suicide, it is quite evident that major discoveries and progress has been made in accepting, identifying, preventing, and treating students with mental health related issues and those at risk of suicide. Improvements can certainly be made in terms of suicide prevention, and my intervention can help bring light to alternative programming which takes both of a holistic and structural approach towards treating mental illness and preventing suicide in college students through open discussion, journaling, self-reflection, team building, implementing sustainable practices, and the exploration of spirituality, self, meaning, and purpose.

College Student Suicide Prevention

When taken into consideration, all of the literature herein reviewed contributes to my topic of college student suicide prevention. Some prior assertions were reaffirmed, but at the same time, much was learned about the effectiveness of these methods. Many of the topics and themes that came up focused on gatekeeper trainings, screenings, peer education programs, identifying the signs and risks of suicidal ideation and behavior, mental health first aid, action plans for change, the inclusion of diverse groups of students, protective factors, stigma surrounding counseling services and treatment, and legal issues. This is coupled with the role that spirituality, or more specifically the role that ecospirituality can play in creating a space in an effort to grow and be challenged while also having a network of support through the process.

Types of Prevention Programs

Prevention programs and protective factors can go hand in hand when it comes to reducing suicide amongst student populations, but they differ by design since you do not necessarily need to implement a program in order for certain protective factors to be effective. Gatekeeper trainings and peer education programs are considered amongst the standards for prevention (Taub et al., 2013; Catanzarite et al., 2013). The Applied Suicidal Skills Intervention Training model is a preventive measure which is more rigorously taught than gatekeeper training and focuses on crisis intervention and establishing an empathetic relationship with an at-risk individual rather than focusing on just identification and referral (Shannonhouse et al., 2017). Pavela (2006) also mentions the Illinois Suicide Prevention model which focuses on suicide as an act of violence which orders the need for disciplinary action. This prevents students from having to leave campus due to liabilities and safety concerns. Many different models have been

created and tried but no prevention method seems to be the universal standard for suicide prevention.

Two other forms of prevention include the use of the internet in order to provide mental health questionnaires and destigmatization campaigns focused on the treatment of students (Hayes et al., 2008; Haas et al., 2008). “Increasing awareness of the role of college counseling in student adjustment and development, differentiating high school guidance counseling from mental health counseling, desensitizing students to the process of counseling from intake through the first session, helping to identify and refer students through early intervention, familiarizing students with the professional staff, and research about increasing retention through utilization of counseling services” have all played a part in effective destigmatization and normalization of counseling, psychological services, and alternative forms of treatment (Hayes et al., 2008). Haas et al. (2008) explores stigma through the use of an online questionnaire which keeps the record anonymous, gives the student information on possible treatments, and leaves the choice of action in their hands. This all shows just how important choice factors into the process of prevention and treatment.

Protective Factors

As mentioned, protective factors can play a large part in a student’s ability to be able to cope with the stresses of life inside and outside of college. Taliaferro et al. (2009) identifies the importance of physical activity and spirituality and how both these concepts can reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and behavior. It was found that exercising every day would allow for a layer of protection to develop against these signs and symptoms which could end up reducing the risk of suicide. Taliaferro et al. (2009) also found that the spiritual and religious realms were increasingly successful in helping students to make meaning out of their

lives and feel a sense of belonging which could also be helpful in transforming their lives for the better and reducing symptoms and signs of depression and suicidal ideation. Owen and Rodolfo (2009) also mention social connectedness as being a major protective factor for students. By having support from people around them, students can feel a sense of belonging and mattering which can play a large part in improving their overall mental health and wellness.

Risks and Signs of Suicide

Identifying the risks and signs of suicidal ideation and behavior is one of the most important steps in the prevention and intervention process. Stephenson et al. (2006) noted that depression and hopelessness are two of many driving risks factors for students when it comes to suicidal ideation and behavior. This was prevalent in both males and females surveyed, but hopelessness was generally more common amongst women when compared to men. Trauma in the vein of physical assault cause men to be more prone to suicidal ideation while sexual and substance abuse were major risk factors in women developing suicidal ideation. Bridgeland et al. (2001) noted the significance of childhood trauma can have a negative impact on student's mental health which in some cases can escalate towards the developing suicidal ideation or behavior. The sense of betrayal from an adult that the child trusts or is close with can cause a lot of pain and difficulties with attachment which can continue to impact a child when they grow older and have an opportunity to go to college. Westfeld et al. (2006) brought attention to recent tragic events and stresses of everyday college life as being contributing factors towards risk of suicide. The concept of posttraumatic growth highlighted takes a more positive angle on trauma and the possibility of those exposed to trauma having a greater resilience to stress when compared to those with much lower levels of trauma in their pasts (Sheline & Rosen, 2017).

Knowledge in terms of identifying signs and symptoms is crucial to the prevention, intervention, and postvention processes.

Striving for an Inclusive Prevention Model

Early on in the research, I noticed a disturbing trend among many minorities and groups that have been historically marginalized. Students that identify as Trans, Queer, Black, Latino, American Indian, or with a disability are astronomically at a higher risk of mental illness and suicide ideation or behavior (Shadick & Akhter, 2013). Much of this has to do with racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, prejudice, and discrimination. These student populations are of the highest risk when they do not have adequate social support around them. Flores and Sheely-Moore (2020) introduced a cultural relational model towards counseling and prevention methods. This model focuses on social connection and disconnection, as well as sociopolitical models of understanding institutional power. This helps to create a more egalitarian relationship between people despite the predominant narratives and ideological struggle that some students face. Muhlenkamp et al. (2009) focuses on the American Indian Student populations who are of the highest risk for significant mental illness and suicide due to the historical trauma of genocide, torture, and cultural marginalization. The four-pronged model discussed focuses on education, spirituality, emotion, and physical factors in order for a more holistic minded approach towards prevention to be developed by taking culture into account (Muhlenkamp et al., 2009).

Legal and Institutional Processes and Challenges

Some research has also focused on the legal and institutional measures that are taken when a suicide occurs on campus. Francis (2003) describes the process that takes place after a student is identified as being at risk of suicide. Confidentiality plays a large part in the process

and for a long time it was difficult to figure out who to include in the conversation. Many times, like in the case of Elizabeth Shin, students were at a high risk, and known to be, yet few or no steps were taken by people with a relationship to them in helping to seek treatment for them (Pavela, 2006). The battlegrounds over the issue of forcing a student at risk of suicide or having attempted suicide to leave campus is still raging to this day. The research tends to favor keeping the student at the university, as removing them entirely could escalate the situation for the worst. Cimini and Rivero (2013) emphasize the importance of postvention in the process of supporting students who are struggling. Prevention and intervention are important but handling the events that transpire after a suicide with care is also incredibly important with identifying key stakeholders being a significant part of the process.

Spirituality and Development

Amongst all of the interconnected identities of students, there lies one that has been underestimated. The discussions surrounding spirituality and development have been avoided outside of the sphere of religiously affiliated institutions, as it has become a frustrating task for many student affairs professionals to navigate (Love & Talbot, 2009). One of these reasons is the association of spirituality with religion, which tends to intimidate and repel many people (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Shunning an important piece of student identity development especially in academia poses a threat to the expansion of personal and collective knowledge. When considering the origins of student affairs and personnel, holistic approaches to identity development have been encouraged (American Council for Education, 1937; 1949). One of the most well explored spiritual development theories for college students comes from the work of James Fowler who explores the role that faith plays in his 5-stage process of spiritual development (Fowler, 1981, as cited in Love & Talbot, 2009). As paramount as his contributions

were towards student development, he focused on predominantly white and Christian religious and spiritual transformation.

For the longest time, Collins et al. (1987) was one of the few pieces of literature on spiritual development within higher education and student affairs. He advocates for a synthesis of traditional and non-traditional approaches for handling spiritual development through faith, reason, experience, and revelation as scientific methodologies are only one way to study, interpret, and create knowledge (Collins et al., 1987). Significant strides have been made in the implementation and development of spirituality on college campuses, but there is still a significant reluctance when discussing the matter on public university and college campuses.

Ecospirituality, Sustainability, and Activism

The connection among spirituality, sustainability, and activism forms a powerful combination of theoretical and practical models which can be broadly characterized as ecospirituality. For example, Taylor's (2010) novel *Dark Green Religion* follows several communities of difference but all of which attempt to save and care for the planet based on spiritual underpinnings. Much of modern ecospirituality is intertwined with Naess (1995) and his vision for solving the environmental and ecological problems that plague the life on Earth alongside developing empathy, care, and respect towards all non-human life (Ims, 2015). Naess (1995) apron diagram, which creates the picture of a tree with deep outstretched arms has its roots in many Eastern traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Much of the process towards embracing these principals can be considered enlightening and spiritual in nature with an emphasis on developing the 'eco-self' in an attempt to challenge the dominant narratives and institutions of the times (Ims, 2015).

Some of the key tenants from the literature highlight veganism, close connections with nature and all living beings, simplicity, frugality, sharing of resources, and creativity and engaging in meaningful work as predominant themes linked to ecospirituality (Carol, 2004, 95; Nath, 2010; Lestar, 2017; Carol, 2004, 50; Witt, 2011, 1059; Jackson, 2009, 151; Lestar, 2018; Carroll, 2004, 54; Carrol, 2004 as cited in Lestar and Böhm, 2020). In the case of Böhm., et al (2014) they present the idea of global ecocultures uniting in an effort to combat the ecological and environmental crises through collective action and practical means.

One example of these ecocommunities is the Hare Krishnas of Europe, who are prominent in the United Kingdom and Hungary. These communities, hosting upwards of 250,000 visitors, are looking for nature-based alternatives to the culture of consumerism, growth, and expansion that dominates the perspective of many western countries (Lestar, 2018).

Another successful initiative from Malaysia focuses on recycling and waste:

Recycling work benefits society and oneself. After participating in collecting and sorting Recyclables, many volunteers realize how arduous this work can be. As a result, they discipline themselves to adopt a thrifty lifestyle and do their best to appreciate the resources that they use. Through participating in recycling, many people at Tzu Chi recycling stations even rediscover lost happiness and health. We have seen numerous examples of people who were originally afflicted with depression or drug addiction cleansing away the garbage in their minds through the act of sorting through physical garbage. They find joy and strength to start life anew and bring happiness back to their families. (Mohamad, Idris, and Mamat, 2012, p. 245)

This process of recycling gave those involved a different perspective on resource management with one that is more intentional and focused on the impact that a single action like recycling can

make on a community if everyone motivates each other to participate in the process.

Considerations for applying this concept to other sustainable goals like food management, waste, transportation, and energy management could yield similar results. Then it could be possible to move on to fixing grand scale issues like climate change, deforestation, and ecological collapses. Simple and consistent actions like the one mentioned above can help to spark personal, local, regional, national, and global change in order to create a vision for the future which hopes to fulfill the needs of all people.

The interview van Schalkwyk (2011) conducted with Tim Wrigley identifies one way of demonstrating activism in conjunction with ecospirituality. “The principle that I use here is learning from nature, to make productive, healthy systems that will support us and keep us healthy” (van Schalkwyk, 2008, as cited in van Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 88). He encourages the people within the villages he works with to immerse themselves within nature in order to have a greater understanding of how important of a part nature plays in everyday life even when we do not directly recognize it. Tim Wrigley grew up as a Roman Catholic, but over time he became more critical of the church and began to seek alternatives. Lovelock’s (2000) Gaia hypothesis, in which the Earth is viewed as a living organism, was quintessential in Wrigley’s spiritual development over time (van Schalkwyk, 2008, as cited in van Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 89). This view of the Earth and how it functions is counter to Darwin’s theory which is focused on competition and survival (van Schalkwyk, 2008, as cited in van Schalkwyk, 2011, p. 89). Much like Lovelock, Wrigley identifies the significance of cooperation within the planet and all of its systems rather than an endless fight to phase out the weak and propel the strong to new heights. Cooperation and collaboration can allow for as many beings as possible to have their needs met which would allow for another level of potential to be uncovered.

When involving the subject of sustainability, colleges and universities have had great difficulty defining it and some debate is still present. Originally, sustainability was defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 8). It was also seen through the lens of green initiatives exclusively (Hooey, Mason, and Triplett, 2017). In the present day, sustainability is considered to be made up of three components, which include environmental justice, economic development, and social equity as powerful vehicles for transformative change within higher education institutions and society (Ralph & Strubbs, 2014). In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly (2015) gathered in order to establish goals attainable by 2030 which revolved around sustainability. Some of these included greater access to quality education and healthcare, good health and well-being, no poverty and zero hunger. Higher education’s role in the achievement of these goals cannot be understated due to their influence on society.

Nature Journaling

One pedagogical tool that has gained traction as of recent times is nature journaling (Tsevreni, 2021). The concept of journaling is helpful in terms of creating a medium for adult learning which is also observable rather than abstract (Kerka, 1996). Journaling has been used thousands of years with nature journaling having been utilized by some of the most influential people throughout time, such as Aristotle, Da Vinci, Darwin, and Goodall (Tsevreni, 2021). Conner-Greene (2000) emphasized the value in journaling in the learning process and application of key concepts. Leslie and Roth (2000) contend that a nature journal can provide a record of an individual’s reflections and observations of nature and this practice allows for them to return to what they had written and reflect upon in during different periods of time. A five-week experiment where students immersed themselves in nature and the non-human world and

engaged in the journaling process allowed for students to collaborate with each other and utilize their five senses in order to establish a stronger connection with nature and the ability to reflect more deeply (Tsevreni, 2021).

College Student Well-being

The discussions surrounding well-being or wellness have spanned several centuries which date back to the practice of hedonism and living a lifestyle that brings pleasure, and Aristotle's Eudamonia which focuses on harnessing potential and being able to thrive in one's environment (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Witmer, 2012; Myers & Sweeney, 2005 as cited in Travia et al., 2020). In the present culture, well-being is seen as complex and multifaceted as well as holistic in nature (Travia et al., 2020). The concept refers to the movement of individuals or organizations looking to achieve intrinsic potential for health and growth (Dunn, 1961; Hettler, 1980; Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Roscoe, 2009 as cited in Travia et al., 2020). Well-being can span a variety of divisions which include spiritual, mental, emotional, physical and social to name a few (Winterowd et al., 2005; Conley et al., 2013; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Ruthig et al., 2005; Gieck & Olsen, 2007; Waldon & Dieser, 2010; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003, as cited in Travia et al., 2020).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) outlines the social-ecological model as a prevention framework. This model, "considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors" (n.p). This moves past just focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of pathological struggles and takes the individual and the environment around them into account. The Okanagan Charter (2015) has also been a tremendous influence on the analysis of well-being on college and university campuses by bringing society, community, and culture into the discussion rather than focusing on the

individual solely. The two components of this model seek to advance health into all aspects of campus which include culture, administration, operations, and academics.

The other advocates for the promotion of healthy actions through a collaboration on both local and global levels (The Okanagan Charter, 2015).

Living-Learning Communities

The concept of this sort of pedagogical model has been around for several decades and it has continued to garner success and attention. Identifying what makes an LLC successful is important when making considerations towards establishing them. As for Stier (2014) he believes that six main milestones must be achieved in order to establish and sustain one of the programs:

- 1) Create an environment where all participants are identified as contributing members;
- 2) Provide physical space for members to interact in transformative learning activities;
- 3) Create an environment conducive to new membership;
- 4) Develop a seamless learning experience between academics and out of classroom activities;
- 5) Build bridges between different disciplines; and
- 6) Allow for opportunities for developing complex thinking skills, social cognition, and creativity. (p. 40)

An LLC needs active citizens who are invested in the people and vision of the community in order to flourish. Meaningful interactions between members and faculty with transformation as the center point is also apparent in being able to establish such a program. An openness to admitting new members into the community and a support for multiculturalism can make the learning experiences more challenging, rigorous, and exciting. Most of all, an LLC needs to allow opportunities for individual reflection, self-discovery, identity development, and creativity in order to provide the community members as rich of an experience as possible. Brower and

Inekas (2010) believe that LLCs should have, a secure and reliable relationship between both student affairs and academic affairs, clear learning objectives with strong academic focus throughout the program and the ability to utilize community settings for establishing opportunities for learning in every situation. A committed partnership between academic and student affairs could be productive since both sides have so much to offer but they both have a common thread which is education whether inside or outside of the classroom. Clearly defined learning objectives can help in the evaluation and assessment process of the program to see if it was successful. Both Stier (2014) and Brower and Inekas (2010) highlighted several factors to consider when attempting to create and maintain an LLC even though their perspectives are quite different.

Southeast Missouri State University

Residence halls have become more insulated over time and these communities are now designed for the purpose of intentional social and learning experiences (Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). In the case of Wilson et al. (2009) it was found that “character develops through membership in a group of like-minded academics who clarify and sharpen a person’s values” (Whitcher-Skinner et al., p. 1). This emphasis on community development also helps in retaining students, as they cultivate a strong connection to the people and values involved (Jaffee, 2007; Frazier & Eighmy, 2012 as cited in Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). Southeast Missouri State University has two models which include live and learn and themed communities (Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). When discussing themed living learning communities, Resident Assistants and faculty are involved in developing meaningful opportunities for students to engage in. There is a diversity of students involved and this model is not based in a cohort model where all students are within the same academic program and are taking the same courses (Whitcher-

Skinner et al., 2017). Themed communities also tend to operate over the course of four years. On the other hand, live and learn communities are more focused on establishing a community for specific populations with a more rigorous focus on ties with academic curriculum. These communities typically last an academic year (Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). Resident Assistants are crucial in the process of bringing these living learning communities to life through interpersonal skills (Whitcher-Skinner et al., 2017). Both of these models are relevant and significant for different reasons but still hold many of the same outcomes for success and retention.

Power and Privilege

Barrow (2019) identifies the limitations of western perspectives surrounding well-being and mental health and vouches for the inclusion of sociological and ecological perspectives for well-being. The focus on the individual pathological in terms of treatment reinforces a disconnect between self, society, and the planet (Barrow, 2019). There should be more of a focus on considering other ideologies outside of those primarily held by western countries such as one that is more holistic by design. A synthesis of many belief systems could help in transforming all that occupies the planet in order to bolster, mental physical, and overall well-being.

Biesta (2017) as cited in Barrow (2019) emphasizes his perspective on how to effectively live and be well in the world:

Trying to be at home in the world refers to the difficult task of trying to be at home where we are precisely not at home, where we have left our home to be in the world. To stay there, in ongoing dialogue with who and what is other, is what I will refer to as the task for education that is neither child- or student-centred nor curriculum- or subject-matter-centred, but that seeks to be world-centred, always aiming to (re)

turning our students to(wards) the world and to arousing their desire for trying to be at home 'out there. (p. 2)

This reinforces the need for a push towards the collective whole of our planet with education being one of the greatest modes for transformation and change. The concept of education can be so much greater in scope and can help to advocate for learning that is more centered on the world we are part of. So much of education focuses on subjects, students, curriculum, and standardized testing which fit the mold of the neoliberal capitalist model in narrowing education to the point of its revolving solely around the material dimension rather than on the human level.

Schumacker (1974) notes the importance of questioning dominant and hegemonic systems:

Since there is now increasing evidence of environmental deterioration, particularly in living nature, the entire outlook and methodology of economics is being called into question. The study of economics is too narrow and too fragmentary to lead to valid insights, unless complemented and completed by a study of meta-economics. (p. 42)

The emphasis on environmental deterioration and ecological collapse continues to torment habitats both human and non-human even nearly 50 years later. Present socio-economic systems are focused on the expansion and productivity above all when what we truly need is conservation and degrowth (Lestar and Böhm, 2020) in an attempt to put a greater weight on personal choices we make which contribute to the collapse of the ecological and environmental landscape as well as the collapse of our souls and identity.

Gaard (2011) gives great insight into the downfall of the ecofeminist movement at the hands of essentialist thought. The movement and philosophy were criticized heavily for a narrow focus on identity and was corrupted by a contamination-by-association. It did not take into account the multiple identities that intersect and influence an individual's unique walk-through

life. Identities such as class, sexual orientation, and race were not represented, and it was labeled a movement for white women which could be considered as privileged by nature. Despite the early success and resounding influence of ecofeminism it was discarded and has transformed and been renamed in order to provide a more inclusive, socially, and culturally aware model.

Connolly (2002) explains, “Every conception of culture, identity, ethics, or thinking contains an image of nature” (p. 51 as cited in Betcher, 2015). The complex interactions between nature and society cannot be understated. Both of these entities have faced off against one another for supremacy and power. The neoliberalized world has attempted to take the attention off of the environmental and ecological factors but in hindsight, the terror and destruction at the hands of such an ideology has opened up many opportunities for resistance and support in favor of what we consider to be nature which is a term that has been debated over time.

Betcher (2015) emphasizes the obsessions of modern societies with health and wellness in a world where it is viewed as a prerequisite for maintaining a successful and productive path of life. Much of her focus is on disabilities studies where she criticizes the neoliberal focus on hyper individualism and personal responsibility no matter the circumstances. Success is entirely subjective but within this ideological framework most of success is equated to profit, production, and efficiency. Someone that is disabled is already counted out in terms of their impact and sometimes cast aside entirely despite the talents and potential that individual may have. Health and well-being are important but are not the only prerequisites for living a fulfilling life, and exclusion of certain populations based on ability is highly prejudiced and damaging.

Current State of the Concern

As we now already know, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide have been a major concern for higher education institutions throughout modern history and the contemporary state

of affairs. COVID-19 drastically uncovered and intensified these issues on micro and macro levels with the world still under the assault of this virus and flustered about where to go from this point in time. Well into the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention performed a study of 5,400 individuals in which 11% of them had seriously contemplated suicide within the past 30 days (St. Amour, 2020). This was much higher in ages ranging from 18-24 which was at 25.5% and falls within the age range for traditional college students. Many professionals in the treatment of mental health diseases have urged against cuts to counseling and psychiatric services and have actually advocated for budget increases and expansion of these programs during these dire times (St. Amour, 2020). This past year has stolen so much from our students especially in the case of first and final year students who may have not been able to engage in campus life and had to work from home which can be a breeding ground for distractions and other challenges.

The onset of technological fatigue has taken a toll on the physical, mental, social, and academic dimensions of students, staff, and faculty alike (Burke, 2020). The lack of organic learning spaces where individuals gather together has been sorely missed by students, as they have had to adapt in ways that have pushed some to their limits. The virtual experience has often lacked in terms of accountability, with students feeling disconnected from the virtual modes of education, support, and co-curricular opportunities. This has stifled identity development for many students and hindered the coming-of-age experiences that would have been present if not for the pandemic (Burke, 2020).

Professional Experience

When COVID-19 initially touched down in the United States, it was initially disregarded, and some believed that it would blow over soon enough. After more than a year's time, the virus

has not left us but has left our society ravaged and broken. This country alone has lost more nearly 600,000 individuals in the past year (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). A number like this is shocking to fathom and this is due to the anemic response to the virus during the final year of the Trump administration. Although I have not lost anyone close to me at the hands of COVID-19, I was still able to observe the damage it has done to my colleagues, students, and higher education institutions overall. Part of the issue is neoliberalism's inability to meet the basic needs of individuals and their families

Last spring, I was a graduate assistant for the Athletic Mentorship program and met with 11 students on a weekly basis. Most of them were swimmers and divers, so they were preparing for the meet which demonstrated all of their hard work. Little did I know, I would never speak with them again in person as the rest of our sessions were held online over Zoom after the university decided to hold the rest of the semester in a virtual setting. I quickly realized that many of my students became deflated, frustrated, and unmotivated. They began to care less and less about their course work and became especially anxious as to whether their meet would happen at all.

Soon after, it was confirmed that the fall semester of 2020 would also be held almost exclusively online. At this time, I was transitioning over to work for student success coaching and despite our best efforts until this day, we have struggled with motivating students to see out our services. The students that have used our services found them to be especially helpful. Many of my students came in ready to just give up entirely, but through some collaboration, those students were propelled forward despite all of the struggles with stress, isolation, finances, and mental health amongst many other challenges that college students can have on a daily basis.

Working with students has also made me realize how this pandemic has intensified so many widespread issues with mental health and suicide being among them which is of particular interest to me. The presence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation for college students makes it exceedingly difficult to stay motivated and to focus on coursework because of all the other possible stressors that are external in nature and out of that student's control. Other stressors like, financial struggle, debt, a toxic home environment, social isolation, or even deaths of family and friends from COVID-19 are just a few of the other challenges that college students might be grappling with outside of school. Many students cannot learn effectively through virtual or asynchronous modes of class facilitation, so this can also play a large part in a student's physical mental, social, and academic capabilities, and ability to succeed and perform at a high level.

In these times, social connection, meaning making, and self-care can make a difference for many college students. Student affairs professionals and administrators have tried their best with involving and engaging students through the virtual world but have come up short in an attempt to replicate experiences which cannot be imitated. A concept like ecospirituality could be especially helpful in the context of the present and near future in terms of establishing a sustainable culture. Ecospirituality represents a way for students to further explore their identity, to introspect, and to grow despite the hardships of everyday life. Ecospirituality can encourage students to make a difference in improving quality of their personal lives by establishing a connection with the world outside these walls and embracing all the non-human life on a similar level as the human life. Ecospirituality could empower students to mindfully and intentionally explore ways in which students can live a more sustainable lifestyle which can also be transferred to the community at large. Ecospirituality can help us regain a sense of appreciation

and respect for all that COVID-19 has taken away from the individuals encompassing our society and institutions by creating bonds both within ourselves and outside ourselves in order to bring about harmony and balance on a planet that is shambling as quickly as those that inhabit it. With the fall 2021 semester returning to in-person instruction to a limited degree and the progress made in terms of vaccine creation and distribution, it seems as though that we may be in the twilight hours of this pandemic with hope lurking on the horizon. We must not strive to go back to how our lives were prior to the pandemic, but to take what we have learned and experienced in order to continue making progress in transforming the world for the betterment of all college students and people alike.

Conclusion

The impact of COVID-19 has triggered a renewed examination of wellness and well-being on multiple levels as college students have struggled mightily with the adjustment to online modes of education which has intensified previous issues related to mental and social well-being most of all. As important as present-day suicide prevention and crisis intervention programs coupled with psychological and counseling services are, those narrowed views on treatment, pathology, and symptoms can only help so much. Multiple dimensions of well-being must be taken into account with the spiritual realm being one that could be explored further. A critical analysis of the systemic barriers which prevent the needs of all people being met and, in this case, students being met must also be put at the forefront. In essence, widespread systemic change and ideological change would have to occur which would be an especially difficult transition away from the clutches of neoliberalism which suffocate and trap people into thinking that this is the only socio-political-economic system available to us.

Chapter 4: Program Development and Design

The initial concern at hand during the early stages of conceiving my thematic concern revolved around how to prevent college student suicide. There has been an array of different strategies developed over the decades which take into account the prevention of suicide, how to identify signs and symptoms of students with depression or who may be at a high risk of suicide but also in regards taking proper steps in a situation of crisis. Many programmatic measures and treatment options have been established by higher education institutions which include, mental health screenings, gatekeeper trainings for Resident Assistants, mental health first aid training seminars, educational campaigns which hope to destigmatize and educate the general population on mental health, wellness counseling, and online assessments which allow for students to connect with their counseling centers for a general diagnosis in a secure and anonymous fashion (Taub et al., 2013; Catanzarite et al., 2013; Shannonhouse et al., 2017; Hayes et al., 2008; Haas et al., 2008; Myers & Sweeney, 2008).

College student suicide prevention and crisis intervention are seen to be generally effective through all of the strategies noted above. Counseling and psychological services also prove to be effective when students choose to take those conscious steps towards seeking support in times which may not call for an urgent need of intervention. These approaches have a focus on treatment and pathology of these individuals and do not put as much of an emphasis on more holistic approaches to well-being or wellness. There is also an omission when it comes to structural and systemic barriers and systems of socialization.

My program seeks to focus on the holistic well-being of college students while having an emphasis on mental health as opposed to the narrowed interest of prevention programs targeted towards students that may be dealing with depression and anxiety which can lead to the onset of

suicidal ideation and the attempt of suicide. Essentially, I am looking to reexamine and reimagine life as we know it in an attempt to provide greater protection and prevention for well-being of college students while taking into account the physical, mental, emotional, social, environmental, and spiritual realms. One of my greatest influences has simultaneously been the most tragic and that is the COVID-19 pandemic which has raged on and ravaged the people of this planet alongside my population of interest for more than a years' time. The virus has brought about and intensified issues such as death, destruction, near economic collapse, unemployment, homelessness, social isolation, suicide, and substance abuse.

Once COVID-19 has been eradicated, I have imagined my program being a sort of break in time where college students can establish social connection and explore a way of life that is different from anything, they may have been a part of. Another major component is related to gaining a greater appreciation for the natural world by to exploring and implementing sustainable practices into their own life and to become more mindful and aware of the impact every action and decision has on the personal, communal, societal, environmental, ecological, and economic spheres of existence. And finally, the proposed program is designed to help students become more comfortable with collaborating closely with a group of individuals and learning how to seek help and advocate for their needs.

Initially, my program focused on a one-week spiritual retreat in an attempt to measure the benefits of experiential outdoor learning for college student's struggling with mental health. Now it has evolved into the creation of a nine month, on-campus, experimental living learning community predicated on the conception and implementation of sustainable practices and efforts which are fixated on social equity, environmental activism, economic development, spiritual exploration, community engagement, service, peer support mental health awareness and

advocacy, and creative expression. At the conclusion of the program, I imagine a community member as an individual who is willing to engage in personal and collective action in order to drive systemic change in favor of paving a way for a more sustainable, just, and equitable future in which meets the needs of all people. And ultimately an individual that has awakened themselves to the possibilities of meaningful work in which they can engage in to live purposefully and creatively while also having a greater understanding of mental illness while also being able to advocate on behalf of their needs.

Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

The purpose of this intervention is to create a Living Learning Community focused on the exploration and implementation of sustainable practices by providing students with a space for collaboration, identity development, creative pursuits, and meaningful work while also establishing a peer support network made up of other students and professionals in an attempt to empower those students to advocate for their needs and to seek assistance when struggling with various dimensions of their well-being.

This program has three goals (followed by objectives):

1. To help students learn to advocate for their needs, to seek assistance, and to participate as active and accountable citizens in a campus community.
 - a) This intervention will help students to identify, locate and more comfortably engage with on-campus resources like the Department for Counseling and Psychological services.
 - b) This intervention will identify and recruit both professional and student staff to participate in this experimental community.
 - c) This intervention will provide students with a supportive and challenging community where discussions about mental health and well-being are encouraged.
 - d) This intervention will utilize a training seminar centered around mental health first aid.
 - e) This intervention will look to closely collaborate with the campuses' counseling and psychology department in order to create a workshop centered around stigmatization/destigmatization.

2. To expose and encourage students to explore a variety of opportunities centered around the implementation of sustainable practices for personal, communal, and global impact.
 - a) This intervention will assist in developing community norms and values through community input.
 - b) This intervention will help to develop a committed partnership with the Office of Sustainability and Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact.
 - c) This intervention will recruit Graduate Assistants and a sustainability scholar to help create workshops and programs centered around meaningful work within the community.
 - d) This intervention will bring awareness to the impact that personal actions can have on the social, economic, and environmental spheres of society.
 - e) This intervention will help develop an appreciation for nature and the outdoors.
3. To establish a space which is welcoming and safe and also allows flexibility for students to introspect, develop, and create meaning and purpose.
 - a) This intervention will provide all participants with a journal to use for self-reflection, creative expression, and nature journaling.
 - b) This intervention will give students the opportunity to develop programs and initiatives of their own to share with the community.
 - c) This intervention will include a yearly, one-week retreat focused on spiritual identity development.
 - d) This intervention will include a weekly state of being check-in as a group.

This Program has three learning outcomes:

- 1) As a result of participating in “A Community of Friends”, students will be able to identify and implement at least three sustainable practices into their daily lives.
- 2) As a result of participating in “A Community of Friends”, students will be able to describe the signs and symptoms of depression and suicide and the steps needed in order to handle a situation where a student is in crisis or emotional distress.
- 3) As a result of engaging in a variety of experiential learning opportunities, students will be able to articulate their sense of purpose and meaning.

Student Development Theories

Park's (2000) notes the positive impact that a familiar and dependable community can have in the exploration of student identity (Patton et al., 2016). Part of my overall thematic concern focuses on identity development especially in the spiritual realm which is a component of student well-being. The design and implementation for an LLC focused on sustainable practices, mental health awareness and advocacy, as well as spiritual development and meaning making takes into account multiple dimensions that factor into well-being. A dependable community of individuals who are willing to support one another through the experiential learning process, is one of the most significant components of this community. Active citizenship within *A Community of Friends* is a necessity for students to extract as much as they can from this experience.

A focus on student behaviors and their actions as well as the energy and investment towards co-curricular experiences are a centerpiece in the learning and development process (Astin, 1984). The degree to which students are involved in their community can play a large role in their overall well-being. Engaging with and dedicating energy to clubs, organizations, employment opportunities, and academic opportunities can provide students with a sense of meaning and purpose as well as a place within the campus community. It is paramount that students utilize and share some of what they have learned in *A Community of Friends* with individuals outside of the program.

Problem Posing and Ecopedagogy

As known, the banking model stifles creative and critical thought while problem-posing encourages social consciousness and political action with the eventual practical implementation of knowledge for driving change in society (Freire, 1970, p. 81). The problem posing model

allows for students to discuss, challenge, ruminate on, and consider solutions to some of the greatest sociopolitical issues of the times. Ecopedagogy has been underutilized, but it poses a learning process which focuses on bringing awareness and possible solutions to the ecological and environmental crises like climate change, deforestation, degradation of biodiversity, ethical consumption of food, and waste management. All of these issues effect the human and non-human realms of our planet and developing citizens that are mindful of the personal and communal impact that humanity has on the social, economic, and environmental while also motivated to work with each other to develop solutions, is of an utmost importance for the imminent future.

Much like Freire (1970), Gadotti (2011) advocates for the potential value of ecopedagogy by viewing it as, “. . . a chance for education to renew its old systems, based on competitive principles and values. Introducing a culture of sustainability and peace into school communities is essential so that these communities can be more cooperative and less competitive” (p. 22). A *Community of Friends* can only thrive and survive through an emphasis on peer cooperation and collaboration. A time and place can be had for competition, but within an LLC such as this one, there is no winning or putting one person over another in terms of their value. Everyone has the potential to develop their own values, beliefs, philosophy, identity, as a unique individual and this LLC is a tool to showcase what can be created or discovered both on the individual and collective levels. Further normalization of helping, supporting, and working with each other will make tremendous strides in carving out the potential for a new world and limitless possibilities.

Program Proposal

The program will encompass three main sectors-structural, programming, and staffing. As alluded to before, this initiative is centered on establishing an experimental space for college students to explore three main interlocked divisions, which include mental health, sustainability, and meaning making. Using best practices, educational philosophies, and student development theories, the following sections will detail the plans for the establishment of a Living Learning Community predicated on experiential learning surrounding the state of mental health on college campuses, the exploration and implementation of sustainable practices, and further exploration of identity which will allow for students to articulate and express their meaning and purpose. An LLC is a prime strategy for student development and learning and would provide an especially rigorous and enriching experience for all students, faculty, and staff involved by establishing a robust network of support and collaboration. The location of this community will ideally be off campus in nature and a site will be identified through rigorous research in hopes of adopting, refurbishing, and remodeling a preexisting living space which can house a specified number of students, is in the campus vicinity, and has a sufficient plot of land contained within it thus providing autonomy while still having a connection and presence within the campus community.

Part 1: Structural

All individuals interested in participating in this program shall submit application to the program development manager (See Appendix B for Application Materials). In turn, there are few requirements for entry into *A Community of Friends*. One of the most significant requirements is for students to agree to act as a support structure for each other in establishing a community centered around the concept of care. The program also asks for individuals to be open in terms of exploring new experiences and forms of knowledge which may challenge what

they know about themselves and the world we live in. Another desirable applicant quality is excitement and passion for the program and some of the mystery which surrounds it. Candidates must be willing to participate in the establishment of community missions, values, and norms which will be initially proposed by program managers and coordinators and modified after group discussion and democratic vote which will then be followed by the signing of an agreement (See Appendix C for Land Acknowledgement and Community Agreement). These guidelines are merely just guiding or propositions, and even though community managers encourage students to at least attempt to uphold them, there will be no penalty for breaking these community guidelines but there will be discussion between student and community leaders. There is no requirement for specific majors, training, or qualifications on the part of the students. All students may apply to the program with preference given to those that have a history of mental health struggles, as only so many students can be admitted in one academic year. Despite this not being a professional position for students in the community, confidentiality and disclosure should be respected along the lines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). At no points should a student, faculty, or staff member inquire about possible student disabilities or diagnoses.

All professional and student staff as well as student residents must undergo training seminars for mental health first aid prior to the start of the program. All students should plan to participate in the one-week spiritual retreat, the monthly community service projects, and the creation of their own program or initiative of choice. Weekly community state of being check-ins with all students, faculty, and staff will also be required. There will also be opportunities to meet one on one with community managers when needed. The program will be collaborating with the Office of Sustainability, Residence Life and Housing, Center for Civil Engagement and Social Impact, Department of Psychological and Counseling services, Department of Philosophy and

Religious Studies, Office of Students with Disabilities, and the Office of Wellness Promotion.

Students will be encouraged to meet with a counselor, psychiatrist, wellness coach, success coaches, advisors, and peer educators when needed. Workshops centered on mental health topics like stigma and destigmatization, self-care, advocacy, and disclosure as well as sustainability topics on food literacy, waste, sharing, and mindful action will be created and facilitated by a variety of staff from departments that the program is partnered with.

Part 2: Programming

A Community of Friends will take place over a nine-month period which essentially makes up an academic year. This initiative will be established only after the COVID-19 pandemic's eventual cessation to assure that no one's health is put in jeopardy. The LLC and programming associated with it will occur during the semester and will act as a meticulous multidimensional co-curricular experience for all students involved. The design of the program is meant to be flexible and to give students the opportunity to provide input on experiences that they would like to have and participate in.

This one-year initiative will include:

- Biweekly workshops on mental health topics and discussions and biweekly workshops focused on sustainable practices and the impact of personal and communal actions on social, environmental, and economic fronts. Other departments will have involvement and will help in terms of preparing and facilitating these workshops.
- All students and staff will be required to participate in an eight hour the mental health first aid training seminar before the start of the academic year.
- A monthly service project chosen by the students in order to make a positive impact within the surrounding communities on the environmental, economic, and social levels.
- A required weekly wellness check-in as a community and optional one on one meetings with the program manager and professional staff.
- A yearly, one-week retreat centered around spiritual development.
- Weekly activities geared towards exploration and engagement with the outdoors. For example, hiking, gardening, planting trees, etc.
- Each student will be asked to develop a program or initiative to share with the students and staff with the possibility of implementation. It can be centered around whichever

topic the student finds most interesting or impactful. They will collaborate with the coordinator for creative expression and projects.

- All students will be given a journal to use for whichever purpose they feel would be most constructive for them. Examples include self-reflection, nature journaling, creative pursuits, etc.

Fall 20xx

Week	Topic	Facilitator
1	Technology, A pandemic, and Mental health	Counseling Center
3	The Soul of Sustainability	Sustainability Scholar and Peer Educators/GA
5	How to care for yourself	Wellness Center
7	Eating for the mind and body	Sustainability Scholar and Peer Educators/GA
9	Defeating the Stigma	Counseling Center
11	Sharing is Caring	Sustainability Scholar and Peer Educators/GA
13	Advocacy for All	Office for Students with Disabilities
15	Mindful Practices	Sustainability Scholar and Peer Educators/GA

*Residents choice activities for even weeks

Part 3: Staffing

The program will have a full-time director, graduate assistant, and sustainability scholar. Other positions of consideration include a wellness coordinator, a social impact coordinator, coordinator for creative expression and projects, coordinator for spiritual development and meaning making and peer educators/mentors (See Appendix D for job descriptions). As mentioned, *A Community of Friends* will be associated and partnered with multiple on-campus departments such as the Office for Sustainability, Residence Life and Housing, Department of

Psychological and Counseling Services, Office for Civic Engagement and Social Impact, Office for Students with Disabilities, the Office of Wellness Promotion, and The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

The program director will collaborate and coordinate with all departments, staff, and faculty involved as well as helping develop programming targeted towards mental health, sustainability, and meaning making as well as attending weekly state of being check-ins and one on one optional meetings with students as needed. Another major responsibility for the program director is the hiring process for the graduate assistant and potential future staff as well as conducting reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and selecting students to join *A Community of Friends*. Since the program director will be living on sight, they will need experience in on-call rotations, crisis intervention, and the documentation process for student incidents. The sustainability scholar will help develop workshops alongside the Graduate Assistant from and contribute to the development of unique experiential programming initiatives centered around waste management, food literacy, and mindful practices. The sustainability scholar will also be involved with the monthly community service project alongside the social impact coordinator. One of the most important qualities for a sustainability scholar is someone who is willing to meet the students where they are in their knowledge and to encourage, challenge, and expose them to new opportunities without pressuring or forcing them (Dr. Paul Morgan, personal communication, April 2021). A representative from the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies will collaborate with the LLC and will be one of the leaders for the spiritual retreat. All professional and student staff will be invited to participate in the retreat and will all be welcomed to attend weekly state of being check-ins and one on one interactions with students looking to pursue a specific area. The graduate assistants will live

alongside the students and act as an RA and mentor and will be involved in the program development process, biweekly choice activities, community engagement opportunities, and workshops.

Challenges and Barriers

There are many barriers and issues surrounding the implementation of this program.

Some of these issues include:

- 1) Coming to a decision on the location for the LLC will be an especially arduous process in finding a space which meets all of the previously stated criteria.
- 2) The significant involvement from so many departments may create some conflict and disagreement in regard to the direction of the program.
- 3) The costs of such an initiative would be quite hefty and attempting to pitch and market it could arrive with some pushback.
- 4) Balancing coursework and all the programming involved within the LLC could be overwhelming for students, so flexibility and leniency will be a priority.

NASPA, ACPA, CAS Competencies

My thematic concern intersects with several of the competency areas presented by the NASPA/ACPA standards. The four most prominent competency areas include, personal and ethical foundations, social justice and inclusion, student learning and identity development, and values, philosophy, and history. Personal and ethical foundations “involves thoughtful development, critique, and adherence to a holistic and comprehensive standard of ethics and commitment to one’s own wellness and growth” (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2009). The central point of my thesis focuses on college student wellness and how to go about implementing mindful and ethical changes to one’s personal life. The competency area for social justice and inclusion focuses on “the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning

environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power” (ACPA & NASPA, 2009). My thesis hopes to empower students to become active citizens in their community in hopes of transforming society in a way that is more equitable in resource distribution while also uncovering the role that institutions and power structures play into the landscape of higher education which in turn helps to awaken a greater social consciousness.

Student Learning and Development is an especially significant competency area for all student affairs professionals and focuses on the implementation of theories surrounding learning and development (ACPA & NASPA, 2009). My thesis focuses heavily on identity development and meaning making and focuses on providing a support and challenging environment in order to help cultivate change and growth in order for students to become more of themselves. And finally, the competency involving values, philosophy and history which is significant for both student affairs professionals and students. This competency area embodies “the foundations of the profession from which current and future research, scholarship, and practice will change and grow” (ACPA & NASPA, 2009). Without defining our personal values and philosophy of education, it becomes especially difficult to articulate an individual meaning and purpose. An awareness and knowledge of historical events and progression can help to inform the next steps towards further development which helps to improve upon what was and what can be.

Chapter 5: Implementation and Evaluation

In this chapter, I will discuss how to implement the program I described in Chapter Four. I will propose a budget and funding plan. I will articulate a plan for leading this effort. All interventions benefit from assessment. In this chapter I will also discuss various avenues for the assessment and evaluation process. I will conclude by discussing the limitations of my research and propose ways to look ahead for this project.

Program Timeline

The planning and implementation process for *A Community of Friends* is especially lengthy and detailed. In this case it is best to be overprepared as changes are inevitable, so a certain degree of flexibility and willingness to adapt must be expected of staff and faculty involved. Even if these periods of time happen to be prolonged and deadlines are not met, it would be best to have flexible parameters for when transitioning from one task to the next due to external factors. The most important deadline would be during the month of August as every component of this timeline must be fulfilled before the start of the next academic year when the first year of the pilot program begins.

Month	Task Description
End of January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and confirm off-campus living space
February-April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation, promotion and recruitment for GA hiring selection and individual candidates. • Meet with on-campus departments.
April-June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Director hires Graduate Assistant for <i>A Community of Friends</i>. • Selection process for interested applicants starts and concludes.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-week spiritual retreat for students, GA, and professional staff. • Program Director, GA, and student residents move-in for the first time.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health First Aid Training Seminar.
December-January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can decide whether to stay or leave during the winter break.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion of first year pilot program. • Celebration and future reunion will be planned,

Budget Plan

Fleshing out a budget is especially helpful when developing and implementing a program which takes course over an academic year and involves so many people and departments in the process. Once again, maintaining flexibility with costs and being prepared for unexpected events is crucial when developing and maintaining a budget. A theme in higher education is the lack of funding that many departments and programs have. This lack of funding forces student affairs professionals to adapt, reconsider, and sometimes make difficult decisions in the process. In reality, these programs are meant for students to learn and have meaningful co-curricular experiences, and this can be accomplished with either a gargantuan or miniscule budget.

Below is a list of items and resources needed:

One-week Spiritual Retreat

- Three professional faculty or staff (counselor/therapist or psychologist, sustainability scholar, and spiritual/religious educator/leader).
- Graduate Assistant will also attend the retreat.
- Undergraduate students looking to participate in the retreat.
- Travel costs per individual
- Lodgings/housing costs of retreat center
- Food provided by retreat center
- Will focus on electronic outreach and in-person outreach i.e. classroom engagement
- 1 nature journal per individual (100% recycled paper product, i.e. EcoJot, Greenfield Paper company)
- Basic Linens package

The Breakdown:

Expense Item	Justification	Cost	Total
3 professional staff	Help to educate and support retreat goers through workshops, activities, etc. Honarium/Professional Development	\$600 per staff for 1 week	\$1,800
Lodgings	Place to stay while on the retreat	\$4,000-\$5,000 for 20 people for a week	\$5,000
Food	Meal plan for 7 days	\$12 per meal for an individual	\$4,560
University Vans/Ferry	Transportation is needed	\$2 x 20 individuals x 2 trips + costs for vans billed to department	\$80*
Journal/Notebook	Nature journaling and self-reflection	\$10 per journal x 20 individuals	\$200
Linens Package	Towels, Bedsheets, and Pillows	\$10 per person x 20 individuals	\$200
			Total*= \$12,000

*Approximation

Staffing and Housing

Expense Item	Justification	Cost
Off-campus housing facility for 20 individuals	A living learning community needs its own justified space and in this case one that also has a plot of land around it. Alternative would be	Ranges based on off-campus or on-campus location.

	occupying a floor of a residence hall if suitable for campus.	
Program Director	Will confirm location for LLC, interview GA and possible students for participation, collaboration with multiple on-campus apartments. Lives in the community with students, and helps design programming and engages in evaluation process.	\$50,000 per academic year
Graduate Assistant	Will act as a resident assistant, peer educator, and will help with program development.	\$20,000 per academic year x 2 graduate assistants= \$40,000

Sustainability Scholar	Helps with development of workshops, and programming surrounding sustainable practices.	\$10,000 per academic year
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Funding

The funds for *A Community of Friends* will be procured through campus donors by establishing and maintaining partnerships with campus departments while also reaching out to off-campus donors like alumni. A Living Learning Community focused on sustainability, mental health, and meaning making could attract the attention of a variety of individuals since much of this program is centered on transformative change through mindful personal and communal action and student well-being. The amount of support given to the program would be based on how congruent the missions and values of the university are in relation to *A Community of Friends*. The program director will ask to meet with representatives from all the previously mentioned functional areas and departments in order to discuss details of the program and how the department would be involved. Feedback from these individual discussions will be taken into consideration with changes made as needed. An advisory committee will be established in order to bring all functional areas and external donors together in one space. All departments will have a chance to meet with the students prior to the program and will play a significant part in program development and the referral process for on-campus resources (See Appendix E for a letter to donors).

Recruitment Process

Marketing Strategies. Due to the flexible requirements for application into the program, finding approximately 20 students should not be much of an issue. The main sources of advertising would be through direct communication with The Office of Wellness Promotion, The Office of Sustainability, Office for Students with Disabilities, Department for Psychological and Counseling Services, Department of Philosophy and Spirituality, and The Office for Civic Engagement and Social Impact through the use of brochures. Visiting classrooms in order to engage students by highlighting all the program has to offer will capture their attention is memorable and effective (See Appendix F for program logo). A social media campaign is another form of a marketing strategy for bringing awareness to the program and Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook will be utilized, and our logo will be circulated through the campus community. Virtual marketing through email and the use of flyers was considered but will not be used as one of the two main strategies for marketing and recruitment. This decision was made due to the mission of the program which is to establish community and to be intentional with interpersonal interactions.

Application Process. Even though the program is open for anyone to apply, there will be a limit set at 20 students who will be accepted to participate in the LLC over the course of the first academic year of the pilot program. All students will fill out an application with guiding questions and basic student information which will be sent to the program director and carefully reviewed by the staff (See Appendix B for application materials). With time, students will be brought in for an interview with the program director in order to have an open discussion which will be facilitated through open-ended questions. (See Appendix B for sample discussion questions). This will not be an attempt to replicate a professional work interview but will act as

more of a back-and-forth exchange for the student to learn more about the program and its vision and for the director to gain a clearer picture of the individual.

Selection Process. As mentioned before, the requirements are not rigorous or selective by nature. The most significant requirement is the willingness to be open to giving and receiving support from each other in order to establish a community of care. A candidate should also be open to a deep exploration of themselves, passionate and genuinely excited, willing to leave their zone of comfort in order to engage in experiential learning opportunities and should be comfortable with closely collaborating with members of the community. No prior training, qualifications, or work experiences are needed in order to become a member of the LLC and the year long journey. First year's students may apply to the program as well. The program director, sustainability scholar, and graduate assistants will discuss which students would contribute and benefit most from being admitted into the program.

Leading a Community

A truly outstanding leader is defined by the people surrounding them. The creation of a vision needs a community to make that vision a reality in order to practically implement it. One of the defining qualities of a leader is someone who is able to empower and motivate the individuals within the collective. A leader should be willing to listen and include all members in the debate and direction of an initiative or idea. In a video presentation, Sinek (2010) emphasized the importance of why, how, and what in terms of developing a powerful and moving message. This video helped to express just how great of a part influence plays in relation to what makes a good leader. Before we can turn our plans into action, we must understand the "why." If this simple question cannot be answered by the leader, then a critical evaluation of the vision and purpose must be conducted in order to clarify it.

The Social Model for Change and Leadership Development (Astin & Astin, 1996) is one of the most significant theoretical and practical blueprints in the field of higher education. It is designed to promote positive change and views leadership as a process most of all. Part of the model also strives to challenge the traditional roles and stereotypes related to leadership which are rigid by design. Collaboration amongst individuals, groups, and communities, are also an especially relevant component for this model, as true change can only happen with a strong collective force of like-minded individuals coming together in order to advocate for it (Astin & Astin, 1996). The nonhierarchical nature of this is especially important when it comes to decision making and policy. So much power and control are concentrated at the top of higher education institutions which creates a lot of tension with the opposing institutional levels. This power should be decentralized and spread out more equally, as all faculty, staff, and students should be involved in the direction their university goes.

Astin and Astin (1996) also mention seven C's of leadership, which are consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship. Each of these values is relevant to my intervention to varying capacities. I hope to create an environment where reflection and introspection can be utilized for students to further push and explore the boundaries of their identity in order to making meaning and identify their purpose. I am looking to help students in this community more comfortably and effectively collaborate with each other by encouraging commitment of as much of their energy as they can to the program, individuals, and the common purpose which is focused on transformation. Within this community, there will conflict and disagreement, but the importance of discussion and trust of each other will bring everyone back together. The final component revolves around active citizenship within *A Community of Friends* the whole of the campus community, and

beyond. One can be a member but keep the community at a great distance. The goal of this LLC is to close the distance in an attempt to come together and do good within the community with social change being one of the ultimate goals and centerpieces.

The concept of the tempered radical is something I could see myself being within the realms of higher education (Meyerson, 2004). Based on my demeanor and how I carry myself, I am not really seen as being the vocal activist type, but inside I do feel a passion, rage, and desire for change, but expressing that is not as important to me. Being the figurehead or the up and front leader is something I go back and forth on heavily, and it certainly causes some tension within me. My purpose would revolve around development of the vision and blueprint for change, but I would rather have others carry that out, while I live in the shadows. This tempered radical role fits me well because I have that rebel heart, but it does not control me to the core. I can be more objective and levelheaded at times and passionate and vocal at others. The battle between my own personal agenda and the dominant agenda is something I could maneuver well due to my chameleon like nature in being able to adapt to all kinds of situations (Meyerson, 2004). I hold collective leadership in high regard and would want the process to be as democratic as possible because of how high I hold the opinions of others. My thematic concern revolves around an issue that impacts the entire campus community at all levels.

One of the most important ways in which I could exercise my leadership skills would be by establishing partnerships with several on-campus departments. Bringing awareness to the importance and positive impact that *A Community of Friends* could have in terms of providing a space where students can learn more about mental health, learn about how to advocate for themselves and seek help, and to become a responsible citizen of the campus community in helping other student that may be struggling or in crisis. The exploration of sustainability and a

practical implementation of lifestyle changes and practices also helps to bring awareness to the social, environmental, economic, and systemic factors which impact student mental health and well-being. In my experience, the well-being of students is one of the most important factors for success academically and socially which means that student affairs professionals must play a large part in supporting students and referring them to other departments that can better serve their needs. One of the goals of my intervention is to create a campus-wide network of resources for students in the program to have easy access to from the start of the academic year. This would be possible by inviting professional staff from those functional areas at the start of the program in order to establish rapport with the students in the hopes of making them feel more comfortable.

Another way to use the leadership skills and theories that I have acquire is by empowering and encouraging the students from *A Community of Friends* to share what they have learned with people in their lives and the general campus community. With transformative and systemic change as one of my many components for my intervention, we must start by assembling collectives and collaborating at the campus and local levels before considering expansion towards the regional, national, and global level. In turn, this would encourage a grassroots movement which would be directly engaged with the near and present communities which takes multiple dimensions of well-being into account.

Assessment and Evaluation

My approach to assessment and evaluation is focused on qualitative methods such as self-reflection and interviewing. Despite the convenience of quantitative methods which have an established purpose of their own, I am choosing to commit more time and energy in order to gather qualitative data. All student residents will be given a journal at the start of the academic

year for them to use as a tool for self-reflection, creative expression, and as a way to track their progress. At the end of the first year of the program, I will give students the opportunity to discuss some of what they wrote with me. This can help me to understand what they have learned, how they have changed, and what they plan to do with all of these experiences now behind them. As the program director I would be vigilant and aware of patterns and themes that emerge from the journals, as I will utilize a method of recording these results within a spreadsheet. Themes and patterns would include discussions on spirituality, identity development, mental health awareness and advocacy, implementation of sustainable practices, meaningful work, social connectedness, purpose, values, and philosophy (See Appendix G for sample journal prompts).

One on one interviews will also be conducted with the student residents where I will come prepared with questions to assess if my learning outcomes were sufficient and relevant at the end of this one-year journey. An interview will be conducted prior to the official start of the program along with one at the conclusion of the first semester and another at the conclusion of the first year of the program (See Appendix G for pre-program, mid-program, and post-program interview questions). I am quite invested in student progress and their change over time and knowing where these students were before the start of the program and to evaluate to what degree this program had a positive impact on them in terms of well-being, growth, development, and acquired knowledge (See Appendix G for well-being assessment). Another relevant component for assessment would be through a student satisfaction survey at the end of the first semester, academic year, and for the spiritual retreat. A student who walks away satisfied with the experience would also be more likely to have an increased sense of well-being.

Limitations

Oddly enough, one of the greatest limitations for my thesis project and program can also be considered one of upmost strength. Due to the quantity of layers and complexities in terms of theory and practice interwoven through this project, it may seem like a daunting task to follow such an ambitious and somewhat convoluted plan. Once again, putting an emphasis on planning is crucial because changes can be made over time especially if I were to consider implementing and testing whether such a program would be viable. Plans can also fall through and fail entirely and being able to adapt when needed would be pertinent for such an endeavor.

Another limitation lies within establishing such a learning community on or off a university campus to begin with. Establishing a location could involve plenty of trial and error and could be difficult given the environment. Attempting to implement this LLC within a city or densely populated area would not be practical or probable. The recommended parameters to find and maintain such a facility would require a lot of labor, love, and dedication and finding students and staff who would be willing to dedicate the time could be limiting and challenging too. I fully believe that students and faculty like this exist, but it may take time to find them.

An additional limitation lies in my research regarding ecospirituality which is predominately focused on theorists, activists, and movements from the second half of the 20th century to the present day. Many of those ideas, perspectives, values, and philosophies were inspired by world religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Jainism, and Paganism (Smith, 2009). American Indian and Indigenous populations, who for thousands of years, have occupied the land we stand on were also spiritual and had a strong connection to the land, each other, non-human life, and the universe with a central emphasis on harmony, peace, cooperation, respect, sharing of resources, and sacredness (Irwin, 1996).

The final limitation is focused on all of the cross-department involvement within planning, creating, and maintain. Although, functional areas on college campuses have similar missions and values, they do still maintain a sense of privacy and individuality. Disagreements and conflict are expected, and these can help bring a community together and have a greater trust in each other. However, they can also divide and break a community apart. These campus wide partnerships are crucial in establishing a stable and powerful network of student support but involving them over time rather than all at once would be helpful once the program is more established.

Looking Ahead

As student affairs professionals, we must continue to innovate and adapt to the challenges of the present, near future, and beyond. College students have struggled and continue to struggle immensely with the transition to virtual learning since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As important as mental health awareness, advocacy, and treatment is, there are plenty of other factors like physical, social, structural, environmental, ecological, and spiritual dimensions which encompass the broad central theme of well-being. The reintegration process onto campus for students and faculty during the next academic year could also be a challenge due to the prolonged exposure and numbness towards virtual learning. In essence, creative and innovative approaches to prevention which target the root causes of college student struggles must be considered rather than focusing just on crisis intervention and treatment options like, medication and therapy or a variety of prevention methods which have success to varying degrees. The whole student must be taken into account along with the environment and systems that impact each student's unique journey through college and the rest of their life.

Conclusion

Attempting to save the world with one intervention is entirely unrealistic and frankly impossible. The Living Learning Community known as *A Community of Friends* is a step in the right direction for reassessing the purpose of higher education institutions and the role that student affairs plays in increasing and bolstering the well-being of as many students as possible. It takes a movement, a vision, and people unabashedly dedicated to transform higher education in a way that is more equitable in meeting the needs of all students while also helping to prepare future generations of students to utilize their knowledges and experiences in a way that prioritizes human and intrinsic value instead of value embedded in capital and material.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Terms and Definitions

- **Banking Method:** A method of teaching which focuses on a transfer of information and knowledge from the facilitator to the student. This is grounded in an authoritarian design.
- **Biodiversity:** ...the variety of life on Earth at all its levels, from genes to ecosystems, and can encompass the evolutionary, ecological, and cultural processes that sustain life” (American Museum of Natural History, n.d.).
- **Climate Change:** “... is a long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth’s local, regional and global climates. These changes have a broad range of observed effects that are synonymous with the term” (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, n.d.).
- **Cosmology:** The study of the origins and evolution of the universe since the Big Bang Theory. Two major philosophical components are “The uniqueness of the Universe: there exists only one universe, so there is nothing else similar to compare it with, and the idea of “Laws of the universe” hardly makes sense” and “...deals with the physical situation that is the context in the large for human existence: the universe has such a nature that our life is possible” (Smeenk & Ellis, 2017).
- **Depression:** “...is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. To be diagnosed with depression, the symptoms must be present for at least two weeks” (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Signs and symptoms include, persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood, feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism, irritability, feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness, loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities,

decreased energy or fatigue, and thoughts of death and suicide attempts (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.)

- **Deep Ecology:** An environmental philosophy which focuses on identifying the root causes of the ecological. Within this framework all human and non-human life is considered to be inherently valuable and society should be structured in a non-hierarchical manner.
- **Ecofeminism:** “explores the nature of the connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature; (2) critiques male-biased Western canonical philosophical views (assumptions, concepts, claims, distinctions, positions, theories) about women and nature; and (3) creates alternatives and solutions to such male-biased views (Warren, 2015).
- **Ecology:** “The study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment; it seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them” (Ecological Society of America, n.d.)
- **Ecopedagogy:** “seeks to interpolate quintessential Freirean aims of the humanization of experience and the achievement of a just and free world with a future-oriented ecological politics that militantly opposes the globalization of neoliberalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and attempts to foment collective ecoliteracy and realize culturally relevant forms of knowledge grounded in normative concepts such as sustainability, planetarity, and biophilia” (Ecopedagogy: An Introduction, 2010, p. 18).
- **Ecospirituality:** “A manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment” (Lincoln, 2000, p. 228).

- **Global Warming:** "...Global warming is the long-term heating of Earth's climate system observed since the pre-industrial period (between 1850 and 1900) due to human activities, primarily fossil fuel burning, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth's atmosphere" (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, n.d.).
- **Ideology:** "...represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser et al., 2014, p. 181). Through an Althusserian lens, ideology is seen as being material in nature as it resides within all institutions, such as the church, school, hospital, university, and prison system. There are two types of apparatuses one of which is the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) which uses force and violence in order to stabilize a dominant ideology when it is threatened. An Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) spreads the dominant ideology through more covertly through social institutions and does not typically result to violence (Althusser, 1970).
- **Living Learning Community:** "...are specialized living environments that connect students inside- and outside-the-classroom experiences. Each LLC is unique, but all are centered on a distinctive theme or academic interest area" (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.).
- **Neoliberalism:** Public goods that benefit all of society are converted to private entities for those at the top of the hierarchy of power (Brown, 2015).
"The idea that the market should be allowed to make major social and political decisions; the idea that the State should voluntarily reduce its role in the economy, or that corporations should be given total freedom, that trade unions should be curbed and citizens given much less rather than more social protection" (Giroux, 2005).

- **Psychological Pathology:** “The study of the causes, components, course, and consequences of psychological disorders. These are characterized by *abnormality* and *dysfunction*” (Holmqvist, 2013).
- **Prevention:** “...intervening before health effects occur, through measures such as altering risky behaviors and banning substances” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).
- **Problem Posing method:** Is a method of teaching founded by Paulo Freire and initially mentioned in his work known as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that emphasizes critical thinking for the purpose of liberation. In contrast to the banking method, this hope approach hopes to make the learning process more democratic.
- **Suicide:** “...is defined as death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A **suicide attempt** is a non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt might not result in injury. **Suicidal ideation** refers to thinking about, considering, or planning suicide” (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.).
- **Sustainability:** “...meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8). It also focuses on social equity, environmental activism, and economic development in order to spark transformation within society (Ralph & Stubbs, 2014).
- **Well-being:** “includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning. In simple terms, well-being can be described as

judging life positively and feeling good” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

Appendix B: Application Process

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of A Community of Friends, a one-of-a-kind experiential journey. All answers will be kept confidential and will only be used to access the application. Please contact friends@yourcampuscommunity.edu for additional information.

Q1 Name

Q2 Campus ID Number

Q3 Do you have a history of struggles with mental health?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q4 Do you have access to any of the following support structures?

Social Support (1)

Medical/Professional Treatment (2)

Housing (3)

Food (4)

Q5 What do you wish to gain from being a possible member of A Community of Friends?

Peer support (1)

Community engagement and service opportunities (2)

Connection to campus resources (3)

Spiritual development (4)

Discussions and experiential learning opportunities surrounding sustainability, mental health, and well-being (5)

A greater sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging (6)

Involvement opportunities (7)

Personal program development (8)

Other (9)

Q6 Short Essay: How would A Community of Friends assist you during your collegiate journey and beyond?

Q7 Short Essay: How would A Community of Friends help you in achieving your personal goals and further developing your identity?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out your application. We will keep in touch. In the meantime, take great care of yourself.

Application Process

Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your journey through life.
2. What moment in time changed the trajectory of your journey?
3. What was the most difficult time in your life up to this point?
4. How do you characterize meaning and purpose? What gives your life meaning and purpose?
5. Who had/has the greatest influence on you?
6. What does spirituality mean to you?
7. What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?
8. Tell me about a time you failed and what you learned from it.
9. What does sustainability mean to you?
10. If you could accomplish something without any limitations, what would it be?
11. What qualities make up the place which makes you most comfortable?
12. How confident and comfortable are you with discussing mental health related topics?
13. How would you like to better serve the campus community?

*I would recommend choosing 5-6 questions per student.

Appendix C: Community Agreement

As a member of *A Community of Friends*, I will be open to learning and engaging in opportunities that may challenge my current knowledge, values, beliefs, philosophy of life, and ideologies. I agree to support, help, and refer other students that may be struggling with their well-being while also being willing to advocate for myself by seeking support through members of the community and on-campus resources. I agree to be an active citizen in the community and will dedicate significant time and effort towards myself and its members. I agree to try and make meaningful connections with other members of the community. I agree to collaborate and work with others when appropriate and to actively work through disagreements in a democratic fashion which takes everyone's opinions and perspectives into account. And most of all, I agree to try and show up as my genuine self every single day.

Land Acknowledgement

The land upon which we gather is part of the traditional territory of the Lenni-Lenape, called “Lenapehoking.” The Lenape People lived in harmony with one another upon this territory for thousands of years. During the colonial era and early federal period, many were removed west and north, but some also remain among the continuing historical tribal communities of the region: The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation; the Ramapough Lenape Nation; and the Powhatan Renape Nation, The Nanticoke of Millsboro Delaware, and the Lenape of Cheswold Delaware. We acknowledge the Lenni-Lenape as the original people of this land and their continuing relationship with their territory. In our acknowledgment of the continued presence of Lenape people in their homeland, we affirm the aspiration of the great Lenape Chief Tamanend, that there be harmony between the indigenous people of this land and the descendants of the immigrants to this land, “as long as the rivers and creeks flow, and the sun, moon, and stars shine.” -Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nations

Appendix D: Staff Position Descriptions

Program Director

Location: A Community of Friends

Category: Student Affairs; Well-being; Mental Health; Residence Life

Type: Full-Time

Summary: The Director of A Community of Friends serves as a central point of support and contact for all members. Much of the position focuses on developing partnerships with multiple campus departments and alumni donors in order to gain funding for the project. They will spend time reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and enduring the selection process. Part of their time will be used towards program design and implementation. They will also live within the community and will intervene in situations of crisis as a Resident Director would.

Responsibilities:

1. Oversee the living learning community as well as the application and selection process for students and graduate assistants.
2. Finance the program through budgeting, partnerships, and grant writing.
3. Supervise both Graduate Assistants for the program and collaborate with the Sustainability Scholar.
4. Engage with on and off campus resources to build a community of support
5. Participate in the program development process which includes, weekly check-ins, the spiritual retreat, and workshops.
6. Will also conduct the evaluation and assessment process of the program through various methods.

Qualifications:

1. Must have worked in residence life in a professional role.
2. Strong knowledge of current mental health topics, discussions and literature, along with suicide prevention, and crisis intervention.
3. Familiarity with current discussions around sustainability.
4. Significant experience and success with program design and implementation.
5. Master's degree required in education, psychology, counseling, social work, etc.
6. Passion and excitement for working with students.
7. Creative and innovative vision and mindset.
8. Experience with spiritual development

Sustainability Scholar

Location: A Community of Friends

Category: Student Affairs; Well-being; Sustainability

Type: Part-Time

Summary: The sustainability scholar will be heavily involved in programming related to current discussions surrounding sustainability and the implementation of practices focused on social, economic, and environmental dimensions. They collaborate with the program director and help with supervising graduate assistants, as well as assisting the program director with choosing a residential space in the community for the establishment of *A Community of Friends*. They will attend weekly check-ins and assist with the community engagement projects.

Responsibilities:

1. Establish relationship with the Office of Sustainability.
2. Facilitate workshops, attend weekly check-ins, and assist and participate in the community engagement projects and initiatives.
3. Supervise graduate assistants and collaborate with the program director.
4. Assist with the application, interview, and selection process of students and graduate assistants.
5. Collaboration with additional on-campus partners in order to assist and support student well-being.
6. Assist program director in securing a residential space for the Living Learning Community.

Qualifications:

1. Expert level knowledge on sustainability, practical applications, and the impact that personal choice has on the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of society.
2. Ability to create and facilitate workshops focused on sustainability.
3. Experience with leading community engagement/service projects.
4. Doctoral degree required in education with a central emphasis on sustainability as it pertains to well-being.
5. Passion and excitement for working with students.
6. Creative and innovative vision and mindset.
7. Willingness to participate in Mental Health First Aid seminar and attend a retreat centered around spirituality.

Graduate Assistant

Location: A Community of Friends

Category: Graduate Assistantships

Type: Part-time

Summary: The Graduate Assistants for *A Community of Friends*, will help the program director and sustainability scholar in facilitating, workshops, check-ins, community service projects, outdoor choice adventures, the spiritual retreat, and the individual student projects. They will live within the community and act as Resident Assistants for the living space and mentors to the students. They must be trained in crisis intervention and should attend the mental health first aid training seminar. The ability to engage with students and develop meaningful experiences and relationships is crucial as these individuals will also play a part in the on-campus resources resource's referral process.

Responsibilities:

1. Play the role of a peer mentor, peer educator, and resident assistant for student members.
2. Help facilitate a variety of experiential endeavors during the course of the academic year.
3. Report to the program director and sustainability scholar about student concerns and struggles.
4. Refer students to other on-campus resources for further support if needs cannot be met.
5. Will be responsible for developing and facilitating biweekly choice outdoor adventure activities and workshops.

Qualifications:

1. Ability to develop and engage students in meaningful programming opportunities.
2. Familiarity with sustainability, spiritual development, or mental health topics preferred.
3. Bachelor's degree
4. Passion and excitement for working with students
5. Creative and innovative vision and mindset

Appendix E: Donor Letters**Letter to Donors #1**

Dear Campus Partners,

I kindly ask for your support in helping make *A Community of Friends*, an experimental living learning community centered on student well-being from a dream to a reality. The focus of this program is on mental health awareness and advocacy, the exploration of and implementation of sustainable practices focused on environmental, economic, and social implications alongside providing a space for students to engage in meaningful work and further explore parts of their identity like spirituality. I would invite your departments support in creating a robust on-campus network with several other departments in providing students with optimal support in order to meet their needs. Bringing all of these functional areas together accounts for multiple dimensions of well-being and perspectives rather than just a narrow focus. With the establishment of an advisory board, I would encourage open discussion and input from all stakeholders in order to make improvements to the program. In addition, I invite you all to meet the students before the initial start of the program as well as opportunities for developing and facilitating programming of your own. Thank you for your consideration and I patiently await your response.

Sincerely,

Stefan J. Martyniak

Letter to Donors #2

Dear Alumni,

I kindly ask for your support in helping make *A Community of Friends*, an experimental living learning community centered on student well-being from a dream to a reality. The focus of this program is on mental health awareness and advocacy, the exploration of and implementation of sustainable practices focused on environmental, economic, and social implications alongside providing a space for students to engage in meaningful work and further explore parts of their identity like spirituality.

We would consider any input that you have and would be willing to further expand upon our vision for the program. Your donations could be used to support two areas of interest. We are seeking funding to support our week-long spiritual retreat to Quinepet Camp and Retreat Center with the cost being between \$12,000-\$15,000. In the longer term, we are interested in searching for an off-campus residential building to house our living learning community which would incur between \$20,000-25,000 in order to cover the costs. We appreciate your consideration and patiently wait for your response.

Sincerely,

Stefan Martyniak

Appendix F: Marketing the program

A Logo



Appendix G: Evaluation and Assessment**Journal Prompts**

1. What was the most valuable thing you learned today?
2. What was the most meaningful conversation you had with someone today?
3. What do you feel like you need at this moment in time?
4. How have you changed over the course of the past couple of years?
5. How was your day?
6. How have you been taking care of your mental health?
7. What qualities do you appreciate in yourself?
8. What are 3 goals you would like to accomplish?
9. What did you learn about yourself today?
10. Engage in activities such as nature journaling, poetry and short story writing, or artistic endeavors like drawing or painting.

Pre, Mid, and Post program Interview Questions

Pre-Program:

1. What do you hope to get out of this program?
2. What additional topics would you like to explore?
3. What component of the program interests you the most? (mental, sustainable, spiritual)
4. What could we do in order to make this a meaningful experience?
5. What questions do you have for us?

Mid-Program:

1. How have you enjoyed the program so far?
2. What programs or experiences have you enjoyed the most?
3. What do you need in order to continue your success?
4. How could we make improvements?
5. What questions do you have for us?

Post-Program:

1. How was the experience as a whole?
2. What was the most valuable component of the program?
3. What could we do differently in order to enhance your experience?
4. What components of the program should be kept?
5. What components of the program should be removed?
6. What questions do you have for me?

Well-being Assessments

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please choose the answer that best describes your experience of each over the last two weeks.

Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been able to make up my mind about things					

Below are some more questions about feelings. Please give a score of 0 to 10 where 0 means extremely dissatisfied/ unhappy or not at all anxious/ worthwhile and 10 means extremely satisfied/ happy/ anxious/ worthwhile.

Questions	0	1	2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?										
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?										
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?										
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?										

*These assessments have been provided by the Centre for Well-being at nef (The New Economics Foundation).