

## Promoting At-Promise Student Success

### Developing a Summit or Professional Development Event

Creating professional development opportunities for faculty, staff and leaders across campus is a key aspect of creating a campus-wide culture of ecological validation. This brief provides guidance for coordinating groups as they explore what types of learning experiences would work at their campus.

After engaging in the learning process internally as a cohesive group, your coordinating group is poised to share this learning with others across campus and invite educators to join the campus-wide culture change efforts. Campus summits and professional development events have the power to break down the siloed nature of higher education by creating shared language and facilitating connections with educators who do not typically work together. Professional development events also provide a space for coordinating group members to collaboratively and proactively upend traditional power hierarchies that exist across academia.

At these events, attendees can learn about: (1) the core concepts that drive the coordinating group (like ecological validation and campus culture change), (2) campus efforts toward creating aligned changes (e.g., shifts in approaches to advising, grant opportunities, ongoing professional development plans), and (3) how these concepts and plans could inform individual, unit-specific, and campus-wide efforts. All of the examples of summits and other similar types of professional development events (e.g., workshops, brown bags) that are offered in this brief achieved these goals while also build community across campus.

#### How to plan a summit or communications event:

1. **Identify your purpose:** Begin with the goal of the event in mind. As a group, discuss with your fellow coordinating group members the purpose of the summit or communications event.
  - Is the goal to inform attendees of an idea?
  - Will you share examples of current effective practices happening across campus?
  - Can you provide opportunities for them to practice implementing the idea?
  - Will you focus on developing capacity within teams/units? Build community and collaboration across divisions? All three?
2. **Select your audience:** The campuses we worked with began with a larger cross-functional event to create shared language and build relationships between educators across campus. One of the campuses created more targeted follow-up brown bag events focused on specific topics (e.g., advising). Identifying the audience frames how the event will be structured.
  - Given the established purpose, who is the intended audience best suited for the event? For example, is your coordinating group hoping to share an idea with “the choir”—the people across campus who are already committed to similar work or “the naysayers”—those who will require convincing of the utility of the educational strategy/approach?
  - Once the audience is decided, think strategically about invitations. One campus, for example, found that colleagues were more likely to attend an event when they received a personal email from a coordinating member they were familiar with rather than a mass email blast or calendar invitation.

3. **Plan and delegate the logistics:** Determine the where, when, and how elements of the event.
- How long should the event be (a day-long summit? a lunch-time brown bag? a multi-hour workshop)?
  - Is this a “one-off” event or is there a way for participants to reconvene at a later date? In our experience, one-off events rarely have a significant impact on campus culture. Are there ways to offer a series of professional development opportunities or connect the training to other meetings where continued work can be done?
  - Does an in-person or virtual meeting best meet the purpose of the event and/or the needs of your audience at that moment in the year?
  - Do you have the capacity to simultaneously manage an in-person and online experience that allows for full engagement of participants?
  - While all members helped in a variety of ways, some prior coordinating groups found it useful to create sub-committees focused on (1) invitations and attendee communication, (2) session planning focused on creating the agenda and materials for the event, and (3) budget and logistics (e.g., event set up, catering).

#### Promising practices and suggestions for planning a summit or communications event:

- **Invite faculty, staff and leaders to create a cross-functional learning space:** Larger summits can be spaces for campus-wide learning and discussions about key goals to improve student experiences and outcomes. Coordinating group members may begin by identifying individuals within their units who might attend and then reach out to units or programs that may not have representatives in the group. The group should consider both student-facing and non-student facing educators. In addition, we found that having campus leadership at the event can send the message that this work is valued and connected to current efforts. (For follow-up events, you might ask each prior attendee to invite a friend or colleague to the next session to expand your reach. Or, you might reflect on data about prior attendees and focus on departments/units/roles that have not attended sessions previously.)
- **Be intentional about community building among cross-functional groups:** In addition to learning about the concept of ecological validation and creating shared goals, the summits create an opportunity to build relationships among units or educators who do not typically work together. We found that facilitating cross-functional engagement led to more warm handoffs after the event – meaning educators would connect students with specific individuals in other units in order to provide holistic support. While some sessions allowed for open seating, other facilitators used seating as a strategy for building new connections by asking attendees to sit with people they did not know or provided time for audience members to share contact information with one another at the close of the event. You may want to intentionally assign seats to create cross-functional table groups. At the beginning of the event, you could have individuals share what their units do as well as discuss why they have chosen to do this type of work in higher education.
- **Facilitate audience engagement:** Plan activities and facilitate learning experiences that help the attendees understand and practice the concept (ecological validation) using active learning, hands-on principles and strategies.
  - **Vignette/scenario-based activities:** At multiple summits and communication events, coordinating group members offered examples of student, faculty, and staff scenarios (often based on their lived experiences on campus) that provided attendees with an opportunity to practice analyzing the scenario and then consider how they would respond and engage in next steps to address the issue. Vignettes that are based on the experiences of your particular campus make them feel relevant and relatable.

- *Student panels:* Invite a diverse group of students who can speak to their experiences on campus. You will want to meet with the students prior to the event to ensure they feel comfortable providing honest feedback concerning how the campus could improve support. Reorganize the time and emotional burden that students may encounter by participating on this type of panel and provide compensation when possible. The facilitator for the student panel should share the questions with the students prior to the event so they can think about their response. Consider inviting students who are not already in leadership positions where they have an avenue to voice their concerns. In particular, the coordinating group may want to consider which subgroups of students have lower graduation and retention rates when selecting participants.
- *Role-play activities:* Giving attendees an opportunity to practice the concepts in action is a useful teaching tool. For example, some coordinating group members acted out how they would greet one another in a validating way by showing the audience what authentic care looked like and then asking others to practice, too. Not only did they make this fun to watch, but they were also vulnerable in offering examples of their prior experiences engaging with students and colleagues.
- *Practical application activities:* Provide attendees with the dedicated time and scaffolding needed to consider strategies for applying the concepts they are learning their everyday efforts, programs, and policies.
- ***Do not simply collect, but actually use data collected from the event:*** Data can, and should, be collected at multiple points in the summit/communications event planning, facilitation, and follow up processes. As mentioned, data about who has attended prior events could help ensure that new people and spaces across campus are engaged to participate in future events. Pre-event surveys can help assess not only who is attending, but also what they are hoping to learn to ensure that you cover what is most pressing for attendees. Post-event evaluations help not only reflect on how the session was received in terms of strengths and areas for growth, but can also collect information about participants' needs and requests for future events. Pre and post surveys can also comparatively assess participants' content knowledge on topics covered and how knowledge changes (and ideally improves) after participating in the event.

### Sample Tools and Resources:

- Here are a few examples of session evaluation survey items:
  - In what capacities do you interact with students at [campus]?
  - Why did you attend the summit/workshop on ecological validation session?
  - How did the presentation on ecological validation change or challenge your perspective on student support?
  - Please list one concept/idea that you learned from today's presentation that you can utilize in your role(s) with students.
  - Please list one concept/idea from today's presentation that you would like to learn more about.
  - Do you have any other feedback for the presenters?
- Here is an example of a session PowerPoint that might help you get started on sharing the core concepts that inform ecological validation.
- Here is an example of a sample agenda for a 3-hour symposium event:
  - Welcome
  - PLC Introduction and Purpose
  - Success Through the Ecology of Validation: Student Video
  - Creating an Ecology of Validation for Student Success: Research Presentation
  - Break
  - Student Panel
  - Applying Ecology of Validation for Student Success: Activity
  - Closing and Post-Assessment

For more information about the PASS project, please visit our [website](#). Please note that resources for practitioners are located [here](#) and materials related to Professional Learning Community can be found [here](#).

### Suggested Citation:

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