Enhancing Student Leadership: A Succession Plan for the Student Engagement Coordinator

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Introduction

For this project, I am assuming the Director of Student Engagement and Leadership role and preparing this succession plan for the position of Student Engagement Coordinator. The organization is a small university that fosters personal and professional development for its approximately 3,000 student body. Established in 1948, our institution focuses on creating a vibrant campus life that encourages student involvement and engagement through various programs and events. Our mission emphasizes empowering students to achieve their academic goals while promoting a culture of inclusion and support.

The Student Engagement Coordinator position requires a candidate with a solid educational background, ideally a bachelor's degree in higher education, Student Affairs, or a related field. Essential professional skills include event planning, communication, and program development. The ideal candidate should possess leadership traits such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, and a commitment to student success. They should be capable of fostering collaborative relationships and creating a positive environment that supports student engagement.

In line with Wiseman's insights (2021), the successful candidate should embody the qualities of an Impact Player, which include proactively addressing the organization's needs, demonstrating resilience, and effectively leading initiatives even in uncertain situations. Wiseman emphasizes that Impact Players see opportunities in challenges and are willing to go beyond their assigned roles to create value for their teams.

Additionally, Pulver (2021) highlights the importance of understanding human capacity through a business lens. He notes that even with the best engagement practices, organizations will inevitably experience turnover. Specifically, he points out that 78% of people who leave their jobs do so for preventable reasons. This insight underscores the need for the Student

Engagement Coordinator to engage and support students and help retain talented staff by fostering an environment of growth and opportunity.

The candidate will interact with key stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and external partners. Building effective relationships with these groups is crucial for the success of the Student Engagement Coordinator, as they will be responsible for developing programs that enhance student involvement and satisfaction while contributing to the university's mission.

Identifying Candidates

I have identified two strong candidates with the necessary skills and leadership dispositions to succeed in this role.

Candidate 1: Alex

- **Current Position:** Student Activities Assistant
- **Demonstrated Expertise:** Alex has shown exceptional organizational skills as a Student Activities Assistant, successfully coordinating multiple campus events that engage students and enhance community involvement. Their ability to analyze student feedback and adapt programming accordingly has increased participation and satisfaction among attendees. Alex's experience in managing logistics and collaborating with various campus departments showcases their capacity to handle the responsibilities of the Student Engagement Coordinator.
- **Leadership Dispositions:** Alex embodies several key traits essential for the Student Engagement Coordinator position. They proactively seek leadership opportunities, often stepping up to lead projects without waiting for direction. This aligns with Wiseman's (2021) concept of Impact Players, as Alex views challenges as opportunities for growth and actively works to create an inclusive environment for all students. Their strong

communication skills and ability to build relationships with peers and faculty further reinforce their suitability for this role.

Candidate 2: Jordan

- **Current Position:** Graduate Intern in Student Engagement
- **Demonstrated Expertise:** Jordan has successfully implemented outreach initiatives to increase student involvement in campus activities. They have shown proficiency in program development and assessment, utilizing their academic background in Higher Education to create impactful student engagement strategies. Jordan's experience working with student organizations has allowed them to build rapport and foster collaboration across diverse groups.
- **Leadership Dispositions:** Jordan exhibits adaptability and a commitment to continuous improvement, traits Pulver (2021) highlighted as essential for retaining organizational talent. They actively seek feedback from peers and supervisors, demonstrating a willingness to learn and grow in their role. Jordan's empathetic approach to leadership, combined with their strong organizational skills, positions them as an excellent candidate for the Student Engagement Coordinator position, as they can effectively support students while contributing to developing a vibrant campus culture.

Personal Development Plan

This plan outlines specific training and professional development opportunities to enhance Alex and Jordan's skills and prepare them for the Student Engagement Coordinator role.

Candidate 1: Alex

Current Position: Student Activities Assistant

Training/Professional Development Needs:

1. **Leadership Skills for Student Affairs Professionals:**

- **Description:** To cultivate practical leadership skills tailored to student affairs, Alex should participate in workshops that cover team dynamics, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. According to Wiseman (2021), developing strong leadership skills is crucial for Impact Players to engage with and support their teams effectively.
- **Where to Obtain:** NASPA offers leadership development programs tailored to student affairs professionals, including online workshops and in-person conferences.
- **Goal:** Attend at least one leadership workshop within the next six months to enhance leadership capabilities and apply learned strategies in their current role.

2. **Cultural Competency Training:**

- **Description:** Alex would benefit from training focused on understanding and engaging with diverse student populations, essential for fostering an inclusive campus culture (Pulver, 2021). This training will help Alex recognize students' diverse needs and develop strategies for engaging them effectively.
- **Where to Obtain:** Organizations like NCORE provide training sessions on cultural competency and equity in higher education.
- **Goal:** Complete a cultural competency workshop within the next six months and implement learned practices in programming efforts to ensure inclusivity.

3. **Networking Skills Development:**

- **Description:** Training to enhance networking and communication skills, particularly in public speaking, is essential for effective engagement (Wiseman, 2021).

- **Where to Obtain:** Toastmasters International offers excellent resources for improving public speaking and networking skills.
- **Goal:** Participate in at least three Toastmasters meetings within the next four months to build confidence in public speaking and effective communication.

Candidate 2: Jordan

Current Position: Graduate Intern in Student Engagement

Training/Professional Development Needs:

1. **Program Development and Assessment Training:**

- **Description:** Jordan should participate in specialized training to design and assess student engagement programs. Wiseman (2021) states that effective programming is critical to creating impactful student experiences.
- **Where to Obtain:** The Association of College Unions International (ACUI) offers workshops and webinars on program development tailored to student affairs professionals.
- **Goal:** Complete at least two training sessions within the next academic semester and apply new strategies to develop a new outreach program.

2. **Diversity and Inclusion Training:**

- **Description:** Jordan should engage in training emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in student engagement (Pulver, 2021). This training is vital for creating an environment where all students feel welcome and valued.
- **Where to Obtain:** NASPA offers resources and courses on DEI practices in higher education.

- **Goal:** Participate in a DEI workshop within the next six months and implement learned practices in outreach initiatives to ensure inclusivity.

Director's Role in Supporting Development

As the Director, I will take the following actions to support Alex and Jordan in reaching their professional development goals:

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Schedule bi-monthly meetings with both candidates to discuss their progress, challenges, and any adjustments needed in their development plans.
- **Resource Allocation:** Advocate for budget allocations to support their training opportunities and professional development activities.
- **Encouragement of Networking:** Encourage both candidates to attend relevant conferences and workshops, including those offered by NASPA and ACUI, and support their participation by coordinating schedules and funding when possible.
- **Feedback and Recognition:** Provide constructive feedback on their progress and recognize their achievements, reinforcing the importance of their development efforts.

Identifying Mentors

It is essential to identify suitable mentors within our organization so that Jordan and Alex can receive support. Each mentor will provide guidance, support, and expertise, helping to enhance the skills and competencies of their respective mentees.

Mentor for Alex: Tiffany

Current Position: Assistant Director of Student Engagement and Leadership

- **Skills and Attributes:** Tiffany possesses extensive experience in student engagement and event management. She is known for her strong communication skills, empathy, and ability to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics within a diverse student body. Her leadership style is characterized by collaboration and support, which fosters a positive

environment for her team members. As Half (2021) notes, influential leaders must have polished interpersonal abilities, and Tiffany exemplifies these qualities.

- **Positive Impact on Mentee**: Tiffany will provide Alex with invaluable insights into effective event planning and management strategies, enabling Alex to develop their skills further. Through regular mentoring sessions, Tiffany can guide Alex in navigating challenges and enhancing their leadership capabilities. Additionally, Tiffany's empathetic approach will encourage Alex to express their ideas and concerns openly, facilitating a supportive learning environment that aligns with the principles of self-directed learning, as discussed by Lejeune et al. (2016).

Mentor for Jordan: Bryan

Current Position: Assistant Director of Residential Life

- **Skills and Attributes**: Bryan has a strong background in program development and community engagement. He builds relationships with students and faculty, demonstrating exceptional interpersonal skills and cultural competence. Bryan is a skilled communicator, able to convey complex ideas clearly and effectively, which is vital in student affairs (Half, 2021).
- **Positive Impact on Mentee**: Bryan will play a crucial role in Jordan's professional growth by guiding, developing, and implementing effective outreach programs. Through mentorship, he will share his knowledge of best practices in student engagement and assessment, helping Jordan refine their program development skills. Furthermore, Bryan's emphasis on relationship-building will encourage Jordan to strengthen connections with diverse student organizations, fostering a more inclusive campus

environment. This aligns with the Personal Development Plan (PDP) concept, where employees take ownership of their growth, as emphasized by Lejeune et al. (2016).

Developing Additional Talent

In addition to the identified Impact Players, Alex and Jordan, I have recognized two additional team members who exhibit high potential but are still in the early stages of their leadership development: Jaimie and Taylor. By investing in their growth, we can further enhance the leadership capacity within our organization.

Candidate 1: Jamie

Current Position: Student Leadership Coordinator

- **Strengths:** Jamie has demonstrated strong organizational skills and a genuine passion for fostering student engagement. They excel in coordinating student leadership programs and have successfully mentored several student leaders in their current roles. Jamie is also known for their excellent communication skills, enabling them to connect effectively with students and staff.
- **Emerging Traits:** Jamie is beginning to develop their leadership style but requires additional support to refine their decision-making abilities and strategic thinking. They are eager to learn and have shown potential in navigating complex situations with guidance.
- **Vision for Growth:** I envision Jamie evolving into a more strategic role within the organization, potentially stepping into a leadership position similar to that of the Student Engagement Coordinator. Jamie needs exposure to higher-level strategic planning and leadership practices to support this growth.

Candidate 2: Taylor

Current Position: Assistant Program Coordinator

- **Strengths:** Taylor has a strong background in program administration and is highly organized. They consistently demonstrate a commitment to student success and have initiated several successful initiatives to enhance program effectiveness. Taylor is known for their reliability and attention to detail.
- **Emerging Traits:** While Taylor is skilled in program management, they must develop their interpersonal skills and confidence in leading group discussions. Their ability to engage and motivate peers is an area for growth that will enhance their impact within the team.
- **Vision for Growth:** I envision Taylor progressing towards a more prominent role in program development, potentially serving as a lead coordinator for larger initiatives. This requires building their leadership capabilities and enhancing their ability to connect with various stakeholders.

Development Strategies

To foster the growth of Jamie and Taylor as future Impact Players, I propose the following simple investments:

Mentorship Opportunities

To support the development of Jamie and Taylor, I propose pairing each candidate with a mentor within the organization who has experience in student affairs and leadership. Mentorship has significantly enhanced professional growth and development (Lejeune et al., 2016). By connecting Jamie and Taylor with experienced mentors, they can receive personalized guidance, insights into effective leadership practices, and encouragement to navigate challenges, ultimately

helping them build confidence and refine their leadership skills. Additionally, enrolling Jamie and Taylor in relevant workshops offered by NASPA or ACPA that focus on leadership development and interpersonal skills will further their growth. Workshops emphasizing leadership skills, effective communication, and strategic thinking are crucial for their development (Pulver, 2021). By participating in these professional development opportunities, Jamie and Taylor will enhance their capabilities, expand their professional network, and gain new perspectives on engaging students effectively.

Measuring Progress

Organization's Mission Statement and Values

University A's mission is to empower students to achieve their academic goals while promoting a culture of inclusion and support. The university values student engagement, diversity, and excellence in service, which guide the development of programs and initiatives that enhance the overall student experience. These values are critical in fostering an environment that supports both student and staff growth.

Metrics for Tracking Succession Planning Effectiveness

1. Retention Rates of High-Potential Employees
    - description: This metric tracks the percentage of high-potential employees, such as Alex and Jordan, who remain with the organization over time. Monitoring retention rates provides insights into the effectiveness of succession planning in maintaining a robust leadership pipeline. A higher retention rate indicates that employees feel valued and see growth opportunities within the organization (Pulver, 2021).

- Connection to Organizational Goals: This metric aligns with the university's mission of empowering students and staff, fostering a supportive environment that encourages personal and professional growth. By focusing on retention, the organization can ensure continuity in leadership, which is essential for sustaining its mission and values (Clark, 2017).

2. Employee Engagement Survey Scores
    - Description: Conducting regular employee engagement surveys assesses the morale and commitment levels of staff within the organization. Engagement scores reflect how well employees perceive their roles, the support they receive, and the overall workplace culture. Increased engagement scores are indicative of successful succession planning, as engaged employees are more likely to aspire to leadership roles and contribute positively to the organizational climate (First, 2015).
    - Connection to Organizational Goals: This metric ties directly to the university's values of inclusivity and community. High engagement scores signal that employees feel supported and involved, which is vital for nurturing future leaders and ensuring alignment with the university's mission

Conclusion

This succession plan outlines a strategic framework designed to enhance leadership development within University A by preparing high-potential candidates such as Alex and Jordan for the Student Engagement Coordinator position. By aligning the succession planning efforts with the university's mission and values, the plan seeks to create a diverse and inclusive environment that nurtures student and staff engagement. The identified metrics—retention rates of high-potential employees and employee engagement survey scores—provide clear indicators

of the success of the succession planning initiatives, ensuring they resonate with the organization's goals. As the university implements this plan, it will strengthen its leadership pipeline and foster a sustainable framework for ongoing growth and development within the student engagement sector.

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