

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## Student Services Master Narrative

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Download date	2025-05-24 20:20:17
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10267/21484">http://hdl.handle.net/10267/21484</a>

When President William E. Troutt arrived at Rhodes in 2000, he began talking with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and donors, and what emerged from every conversation was the importance of making connections. Every student that comes to Rhodes needs to make vital connections to other students, to the campus community, and to the community outside our gates – the world. Making these connections is typically understood as the work of the faculty, and to this point, the faculty has been hard at work developing the new Foundations Curriculum precisely to maximize the opportunities for these connections and their effects. Making the difference in student's lives, however, requires that we make changes in what are customarily considered "student services," those functions that support the students as they manage their academic lives, to address the needs of the whole person, to deliver true liberal education value.

In 2005, Rhodes faced an unprecedented opportunity formed from the convergence of exciting changes at the college including the new outcomes-based Foundations Curriculum, the re-centering of campus around the newly-constructed Paul Barret, Jr. Library, the imminent vacancy of the Burrow Library, increased opportunities for community partnership, and a growing emphasis on fully-invested and engaged students. To take advantage of that opportunity and to address the issue of student connections, Dr. Troutt in May, 2005, charged a Student Services Reengineering Steering Team of administrators from student affairs, academic affairs, admissions and financial aid, and finance with the task of examining the student services and contemplating what would constitute the best student services a liberal arts college could provide. Specifically, the team was asked not merely to find out what other, premier liberal arts colleges are doing but to reach farther, dream bigger, and act bolder – not in making minor, incremental changes to existing services and structure, but in making courageous, radical leaps of imagination. The team was charged with keeping in mind that student services should:

1. Delight students with the ease of use;
2. Connect student to the resources they need to take full advantage of all Rhodes has to offer;
3. Anticipate student needs with proactive steps and structures;
4. Respond to student feedback for continual service improvement; and
5. Be joyful work for employees.

The Steering Team worked from evaluating the very definition of "student services" through identifying the interlinkage of processes ranging from recruiting, to servicing financial accounts, and to providing daily services, information and advising. Student persistence was recognized as critical to making these connections and making them last and retention, therefore, figured prominently in their thinking.

In September, 2005, the Steering Team presented findings and recommendations to the President's Staff. Among the findings was a formalized definition for student services: Student Services support students in their intellectual and personal development and connects them to Rhodes College, their communities, and the world. Additionally, in mapping 108 student service processes, the team discovered the following:

- that many employees provide a very similar function for students seeking out-of-class learning opportunities;
- that services with many people involved in the delivery of a service are hard for students to navigate;
- that we overlook student needs in subtle ways;
- that students need to know how they can belong even when we are telling them that their first choice opportunity is not available;
- that we could take better advantage of some opportunities if we had better information, such as the identity of students with whom we are not connecting;
- that student organization leaders experience difficulty using college services, particularly in planning events;

- that processes can inadvertently exclude stakeholders who ought to be involved;
- that some services have higher status because they serve the highest performing students or because they are perceived as more educational.

The team defined the attributes of a change process that would enable the reengineering of student services to address these discoveries.

The recommendations of the Steering Team were two-fold. First, the team recommended that we establish three centers of student service functions: a transaction center (Rhodes Express), a student organizations center, and an advising and academic center. Second, the team recommended that the President designate a second team to design and implement the direction defined by the Steering Team. By January, 2006, the individuals recommended by the Steering Team had been convened as the Student Services Reengineering Design and Implementation Team (also known commonly as “D&I”). The members of this team included mid-level (associate director and director level) staff from admissions, physical plant, information technology, the bursar’s office, student affairs, career services, institutional research, and a faculty member. The vision for student services was communicated to the new team, “to create exceptional and memorable connections that delight students and make a critical difference in their Rhodes experience.”

The D&I team worked through June, 2006, poring through data and benchmarking other organizations. Benchmarking partners for D&I and other reengineering teams included a diverse array of organizations, from other colleges such as Pepperdine University and Wheaton College (MA) to industrial companies like Buckman Laboratories and FedEx to non-profits like Bellevue Baptist Church. Data considered by the team came from

- administrations of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement,
- focus groups with students and with faculty and staff,
- multiple internal surveys related to advising, service delivery,
- service responsibility matrices, and
- our data warehouse.

Combining that data with Hoshin breakthrough-planning tools (such as affinity diagramming, interrelationship graphing, flowcharting, process mapping, etc.), change-management skills, and facilitation skills, the team uncovered specific disconnects in service delivery that were impacting students negatively and identified that the College’s levels of service were inconsistent with the College’s level of academic challenge.

In response, the D&I team established a number of teams to embark upon several projects to make services student-centric; the development of those projects is depicted in the graphic below. Originally, five teams were created:

- The Events Management team, which has successfully redesigned the event planning process and implemented a new events management system for staff and student organization leaders as suggested by the Steering Team
- Rhodes Express, whose task is to implement the transaction center envisioned by the Steering Team. They have begun cross-training and will open the transaction center in August, 2008.
- Data Services, a non-student-facing service team whose job is to centralize data processing and reporting to enable the work of the student-facing service teams.
- The Employee Development team, tasked with supporting and empowering service delivery staff through training and recognition.

- The Advising Pilot team, charged to develop an experiment that would test innovating ways to leverage the faculty-student relationship to improve staff-student relationships while simultaneously increasing new students' connectedness to the College.

Events Management, Rhodes Express, Data Services and the Employee Development teams all have made great strides towards their goals. The work of the Advising Pilot team exploded into a much larger context that spawned three new teams:

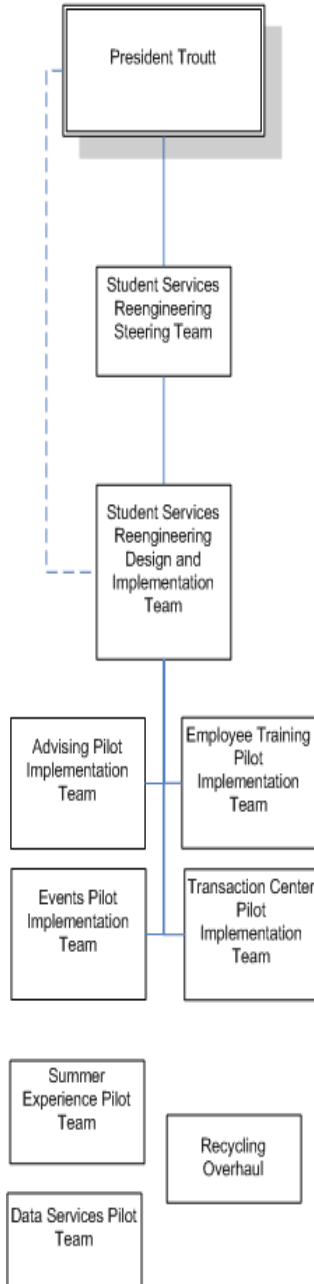
- Enrolling and Financing, which will help students get into and stay in Rhodes College.
- Student Development and Academic Success, and Out-of-Class and Post-baccalaureate Opportunities who together will implement the advising and academic center envisioned by the Steering Team.
- Student Organization Development, which will implement the student organization center envisioned by the Steering Team.

Additionally, at least two other teams arose outside the formal Student Services reengineering process that took on the same values, tools, and techniques. One was a team that created Open Rhodes, the College's first-ever summer orientation. Another is the Recycling team, which designed our current College-wide recycling system.

The members of these teams are the staff and faculty who actually deliver student services. Since 2007, they have been working with architects to rehabilitate the former library building as the new Burrow Center for Student Opportunity, which will house these new centers for student service. The Center will officially open in winter of 2008. The NSSE data that helped reveal opportunities for improvement will in the future serve as benchmarks for determining the success of these changes.

The chart below visually depicts the lineage of these various teams, a timeline of activities of these teams, and how the reengineering effort was shared with the campus community and input was solicited.

## Lineage



## Activity

Dr. Trout appoints steering team to examine student services and contemplate what would constitute the best student services a liberal arts college could provide.  
(May, 2005)

Steering Team makes three recommendations to President's staff:

1. culture shift in way decisions are made
2. development of 3 logical centers: advising, transactions, and involvement
3. Creation of a second team – closer to the detail - for design and implementation of direction they defined.

Steering team selects specific individuals for this second team.  
(July-August, 2005)

Dr. Trout appoints D&I team as recommended by steering team. Charges D&I team with developing the vision of the steering team into a design and to initiate its implementation within six months, with a working pilot program(s) at the end of that period.  
(October, 2005)

D&I Team learns and uses "Breakthrough Planning" tools and techniques, collects and analyzes large amounts of data, and eventually proposes four pilot projects (literally small-scale tests) to President's staff. Pilots are approved, D&I team appoints 4 teams to implement pilots, with a pair of D&I team members facilitating each pilot team.  
(January - July, 2006)

Data-driven emphasis and breakthrough planning tools are shared with other staff and faculty, resulting in other initiatives working in a similar manner as student services pilots, but not formally Descending from those efforts.  
(fall, 2006)

## Communications

President convenes all-staff meeting in McCallum to address student-centeredness, describing his vision and laying the foundation for student services reengineering.  
(September, 2005)

Message on student-centeredness repeated in Inside Rhodes  
(November, 2005)

Throughout the process, input is collected from students, staff, and faculty via surveys, focus groups, tick sheets, and other techniques.  
First public call for participation in focus groups related to student services reengineering is made in January, 2006.

Dr. Trout addresses campus in McCallum Ballroom, endorsing work of the steering team and announcing formation of the D&I team. Introduced Carol Casey, member of both teams, to explain the work.  
(January, 2006)

Public "townhall" meeting held in Barret 051 to introduce Concepts of the 4 pilots, solicit input, and invite involvement.  
(July, 2006)

Public update meeting in Frazier Jelke A, after which we broke out into FJ B and C to allow people to meet with individual pilots to ask questions, provide comments, or get involved.  
(August, 2006)

President calls campus meeting in McCallum Ballroom, Specifically endorses all four pilots and invites team members To share progress.  
(September, 2006)