The Student Learning/Living Task Force was charged with making recommendations that will develop a more holistic community for all of our students -- one that integrates and co-curricular experiences and provides students with a sense of home and belonging. Together, the members of our Task Force and Working Groups have engaged in a rigorous process of community consultation, including approximately 50 listening sessions with faculty, staff, students and Waltham based community partners. We conducted a survey of alumni, as well as two alumni focus groups. With the support of Susan Campbell Baldridge and through the professional networks of Working Group members, we have done multiple consultations with leaders at peer institutions (e.g. Yale, Rice, Vanderbilt, Washington University in Saint Louis, Columbia, University of Chicago). We have also consulted data about best practices from the Educational Advisory Board.

Each of our Working Groups has generated a list of recommendations prioritized by the time and resources that would be needed to achieve these changes, as well a comprehensive report. In this document, we present key themes which emerged across the Working Groups, as well as a synthesis of their recommendations. The Working Group reports, which include additional context and recommendations, follow our summary.

Cross-cutting Themes

**A Mission Driven Education**: A central concern of our Task Force is that Brandeis largely lacks a unified message about what our education means, what the values for our community should be, and what positively defines the Brandeis student experience. We cannot develop integrated programming and experiences for students (nor can we assess its effectiveness) in the absence of overarching goals for student learning and development. The most prevalent message in our undergraduate community seems to be that what makes Brandeis special is that students can have multiple majors and minors; the more this becomes an expectation, the more academic pressure students experience. Another prevalent message is that Brandeis has a history of commitment to social justice (however defined). Despite a thriving culture of community service among students (e.g., the Waltham Group), however, there are almost no connections between student-led engagement efforts and the curriculum. Further, the University is decades behind peer institutions in its support for community engaged research, teaching, and service, which also raises questions about the University’s mission and values.

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Few Links Between Academic and Co-Curricular Life: Both undergraduate and graduate students generally experience their academic life as completely separate from their residential and co-curricular life. They rarely see faculty outside of class, office hours and lab, in part because there are relatively few formal mechanisms to do so. Because faculty workloads are heavy, particularly in departments and interdepartmental programs with large number of majors and/or Master’s students, Brandeis needs ways to incentivize and provide resources for out of classroom experiences with faculty. Similarly, students and alumni would like more interactions between each other. Once we define the elements of a mission driven Brandeis education, these values could provide a framework for developing a much-needed overarching assessment plan about the student experience and how different offices contribute to those experiences.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: As we rethink the student living-learning experience, it is critical that the next steps of the Framework process demonstrate a strong commitment -- with clearly defined goals and measurable outcomes -- to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the listening tours, we regularly asked students what would foster a greater sense of community at Brandeis. Much to our surprise, the consistent answer was that community happens when individuals are surrounded by others who are very much like them (i.e., student athletes, fraternities and sororities, other affinity groups). Further, our listening sessions across campus echoed the findings of the Independent Investigators’ Report that “Students of color, especially from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, often feel that the majority of students and faculty are not open or welcoming with respect to the value their life experience brings to the community” (p. 30). Similarly, international students often feel excluded by their domestic peers, while navigating negative stereotypes from some faculty. Students with disabilities also face marginalization from peers, faculty, and staff, as well as a campus that is physically difficult to navigate. Graduate students often experience marginalization at Brandeis, and they comment that when the term student is used, it typically refers to undergraduates, rendering the graduate student population invisible.

To be successful in the working world, individuals must be able to not only work with those who are different from them, but embrace difference as a source of strength. We recognize that the ability to navigate difference is a learned skill, and resources must be invested in this work. We need sustained and serious institutional attention to how issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion shape the student learning and living experience at Brandeis. This cannot be carried by a subset of individuals or offices of the University, rather it needs to be modeled across campus and in both the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Supporting Student Mental Health: All working groups recognized that our students—undergraduate and graduate—are under a tremendous amount of stress, often coupled with feelings of isolation and anxiety. While it is clear that the Brandeis Counseling Center needs more staff, particularly staff from diverse backgrounds who reflect our undergraduate and graduate student populations, we also need to shift our student services approach from a reactive to a proactive model. Because of a variety of factors -- resources, physical structures, workloads -- Brandeis has become a campus that is well versed at supporting students in crisis, rather than building structures that promote well-being. More broadly, several groups (i.e., the BCC, Chaplaincy, Care Team, Health & Wellness) recommended developing
frameworks and resources that would support students in practices of introspection, meaning-making, discernment, and self-care. Other groups worried that students placed so much value on a breadth of experiences (multiple majors and minors, a plethora of clubs) that they often forgot the joy of having an academic or co-curricular activity that provides depth of experience.

**Staffing Needs:** A strong theme across the conversations within and beyond our group has been that Brandeis needs to invest resources into recruiting additional staff and faculty. Many members of our community are concerned that the Framework will raise expectations for our community without providing adequate resources. Faculty, staff, and students, alike, have responded to the overall Framework -- and to our requests for their thoughts about the future of the University -- with profound skepticism, as they feel like they have been asked repeatedly about what would improve the student experience, with no discernable results. All staff hires should reflect the changing demographics of Brandeis’ undergraduate and graduate student populations.

**Physical Plant Needs:** All working groups identified the need for a better physical plant. Both undergraduates and graduate students need additional spaces in which to study or socialize. Faculty report that they would spend more time on campus if the thermostats in their offices were functional; trash was regularly removed; and there were more comfortable places for meetings with students. The library is overcrowded; we lack modern and welcoming residence halls; and our campus centers lack the vibrancy and community building functions found on other campuses. We recognize that systems (HVAC, leaking roofs) need to be repaired, and we simultaneously recognize that our buildings, particularly many of our first-year and second year halls, are not fulfilling student’s basic needs of feeling a sense of home.

**Improving Campus Communication:** Communication, both within and beyond campus, is a central challenge. The University needs to create a way to communicate with graduate and undergraduate students; it would make sense to identify a staff person in the Office of Communications who is responsible for all student communication. A central University calendar needs to be established that includes all events and could be shared with Waltham Community members and other local Colleges/Universities. In addition, finding out about resources can be difficult for both graduate and undergraduate students; a centralized portal for each student population would be helpful. Lastly, we note that the Framework and its implementation will require even more regular and intentional communication with the entire Brandeis community, which cares deeply about how its goals will be prioritized, resourced and implemented.

Our recommendations are meant to respond to the priorities identified in the Framework for the Future and the themes that emerged from our extensive process of community consultation.

**Immediate Goals, Modest Resources**

- Develop the tenets of what is a mission driven education for Brandeis. By defining our values and goals, we can create learning outcomes that drive our co-curricular programming and assessment. All of Undergraduate and Graduate Offices (e.g., Student Affairs, Academic Affairs,
GSAS) should then use these values to shape learning outcomes, co-curricular programming, and assessment for their work.

● Extend Orientation, both by adding to the length of New Student Orientation and by establishing orientation groups which meet at regular intervals during students’ first year on campus.
  ○ The initial Orientation for undergraduate and graduate students alike should include substantial programming regarding academics (including imposter syndrome), advising resources, support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (including skills for dialogue across difference), and programming that highlights resources for health and wellness.
  ○ For graduate students, Orientation specifically should include social events that facilitate inter-program and inter-school interaction.
  ○ For undergraduates, Orientation should foster connections between students and faculty that are often difficult to establish in the first two years of college, particularly for students in large majors.
  ○ Orientation is also a time that can be leveraged to establish traditions that will generate a sense of community, connection, and school pride. We recommend welcoming returning students back to campus a few days before classes start, so that they can participate.

● Restructure academic advising for both undergraduate and graduate students, including:
  ○ Rethink faculty involvement in undergraduate pre-major/post major advising, with the goal of fostering stronger connections between students and faculty. The first-year faculty advising program is not considered effective by students (while some faculty find it effective, many do not) and should be replaced by a model of staff advisors augmented by intentional relationship building with faculty through other types of interactions.
  ○ Integrate GSAS and Hiatt Career Services, while establishing connections between all career development teams including IBS and Heller.
  ○ Invest in additional career counseling resources at both the undergraduate and graduate level and actively grow formal relationships between career services and alumni. Hiatt has piloted a program with student-athletes that could be a model for the larger population.
  ○ Establish a yearly “alumni department representative” (ADR) for each major (e.g., departments and programs). This person would serve as an informal career advisor and mentor to majors in the department/program.
  ○ Reframe the meaning of academic majors, so that they become homes for students, fostering a sense of identity and community through shared intellectual pursuits and co-curricular programming. The Department of African and African-American studies is an exemplar of this approach.
  ○ Consider expanding peer advising in the undergraduate and graduate student communities. Standardize compensation for peer advisors, including, for example, UDRs and Orientation Leaders.
- Develop clear and consistent communications about the roles of different types of faculty, staff, and peer advisors.

- Identify opportunities to bring a diverse and dynamic campus community together and build a sense of connection and community that includes alumni:
  - Create campus-wide traditions, some of which celebrate Brandeis’ historical founding as a Jewish sponsored institution and some of which celebrate the other mission driven values of our institution. Conclude the Spring semester with a campus wide event that marks the end of the academic year, with both reflection and celebration.
  - Designate a 90-minute block, between 11am-5pm, once a week, during which no classes are scheduled. This would be a time for large scale community gatherings and fun events (including “de-stress” events and activities focused on well-being).
  - Require both first year students and sophomores to live on campus, as this is a time of academic transition and social transition. In the spirit of the Residential College model, have first-year students and sophomore live in the same residence hall for their first two years. Associate halls with the Waltham group and a varsity athletics team. Establish an annual fund for each residence hall to have a “beautification project” which is determined by the students living in the hall using a student governance model.
  - Have faculty serve in formal roles that are associated with the residence halls. These positions should be paid positions with job descriptions, learning outcomes, and assessment. Establish a faculty advisory committee to work with residence life and academic advising in order to build horizontal connections across the university.
  - Leverage the Brandeis Core and the First Year Experience to develop parallel programming in the residence halls, again with learning outcomes and assessment.
  - Examine how different universities balance residential colleges with affinity housing, particularly affinity housing for students of color.
  - Provide resources for programming that combines academic and social experiences, such as outings to cultural events, service opportunities, faculty lectures in the residence halls, faculty and staff facilitated affinity groups in the halls (i.e., for programming such as dessert making or Zen Zone), and/or athletic events.
  - Make traditions for each class year. At Brandeis, we once had a very popular sophomore barbeque in the first week of class near East Quad. Other schools have ritual celebrations for declaring a major and/or finishing one’s last undergraduate final as a senior.
  - Use dining as a way of bringing people together (including removing the physical wall in Usdan); educating students about Kosher dining in the hallway leading into the hall; celebrating different cultures through food and food choice; expanding the take-a-professor-to-lunch program; allowing students to donate unused meals/points to students facing food insecurity; and allowing seniors to donate some portion of unused meals/points to the senior gift. The start and end date for meal plans should be coordinated with Student Affairs in order to ensure there is no unnecessary billing from one department to another.
○ Invite alumni into emerging campus traditions and event.

- Create a separate review committee to better understand the role of Greek Life on campus. This review should consider Greek Life from multiple perspectives, including how it comports with our foundational values and how it contributes to a sense of community at Brandeis, as well as best practices and recent trends in higher education (i.e., many campuses have decided in recent years to no longer recognize fraternities and sororities).

Intermediate Goals, Moderate Resources

- Implement an official internal communication system for the entire Brandeis community. This should be connected to the website, which should be interactive, easily navigated, and cater to the needs of students. This would have both vertical and horizontal aspects, as it would allow for a centralization of campus-wide events, while also allowing for communication that is program-specific. Add something about portal for graduate students to find advising resources.

- Renovate residence halls (i.e., based on information from the Accurent Report) and prioritize:
  ○ Soundproofing and insulation; making the residence halls accessible; creating additional gender-neutral restrooms; adding as much lounge space as possible for both academic events and social event; modern cardiovascular workout facilities featuring appropriate free weights; and offices for administrative staff (Brandeis Counseling Center, Academic Services, etc.).
  ○ Student participation in the planning process, with the recognition that students are the ones who are best able to articulate their physical, social, emotional, and mental health needs.

- Improve transportation resources, including
  ○ Improve the shuttle schedules to align with class schedules.
  ○ Extend the hours for the Joseph's shuttle to cover Orientation, evening classes, and breaks.
  ○ Evaluate demand and increase shuttle capacity during peak hours.
  ○ Subsidize commuter rail and public transportation options.
  ○ Expand parking availability.

- Establish resources that support graduate and undergraduate students from low-income backgrounds including:
  ○ Enhance dining, transportation, community engagement opportunities, cultural programming, and other campus services to support students who remain on campus during “breaks” (i.e., times when classes are not in session).
○ Provide more job opportunities for students, with a particular focus on opportunities for international students who are not allowed to work off campus.
○ Establish an emergency fund for undergraduate and graduate students. (Petrie depleted)

● Provide guidelines and training for best practices in mentoring graduate and undergraduate students, including
  ○ Build a vertically integrated mentorship network among faculty, staff and peers and extend it horizontally across programs and schools.
  ○ Establish programming to facilitate inter-racial and intercultural dialogue.
  ○ Recognize, reward, and incentivize faculty for excellence in advising both undergraduate and graduate students.

● Strengthen Brandeis’ relationship with community partners in Waltham and Boston
  ○ Establish a “Day of Service” in which Brandeis welcomes members of the Waltham and Greater Boston communities to campus to engage in activities – both fun and serious – that align with the skills of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.
  ○ Move a greater proportion of community based federal work-study lines to the Department of Community Service (DCS). Identify additional funding for students not eligible for federal work study lines, but who require support in order to integrate community engagement into their Brandeis experience.
  ○ Support novel initiatives which will leverage the skills and expertise of Brandeis faculty and staff to support the needs of community-based organizations.

Long Term Goals, Significant Resources

● Build, renovate and create spaces that better support our students, help to build community, and reflect the University's mission, values, and vision. Necessary spaces include but are not limited to:
  ○ New or renovated residence halls that provide modern and welcoming spaces for academics, community gathering and social spaces; the elimination of triples; fully accessible housing; gender neutral/gender inclusive/all gender restrooms; and in-house programming by faculty, staff and students. All spaces should also be fitted with energy efficient air conditioning and heating systems.
  ○ Additional residence hall living spaces sufficient to guarantee undergraduate housing for all four years.
  ○ New graduate student housing that is inclusive of students with partners and children, competitively priced, and of comparable quality to that available in Waltham.
  ○ A clearly defined student center (likely by renovating Usdan) and campus center (likely by renovating the SCC).
  ○ A dedicated flexible multi-purpose graduate student community space including a separate satellite of the Brandeis Counseling Center.
● Create additional staff positions throughout the University, including but not limited to:
  ○ Additional professional undergraduate academic advisors based on best practices for staffing ratios, such that each student has the opportunity to have a personalized advising experience. These advisors, as well as the advisors in Academic Services (i.e., pre-health advising, student accessibility support, academic fellowships, TYP), would work in partnership with the academic departments.
  ○ Graduate student staff advisors who will be the first responders for students experiencing academic, social, and cultural challenges, focused on helping student complete their academic programs, integrate in the community and connect to resources
  ○ Additional staff in all student facing offices, with special attention to those charged with implementing these recommendations, in addition to Hiatt and the Brandeis Counseling Center.
  ○ Two Associate Dean positions (one for GSAS and one for IBS) dedicated to issues of climate and cultural competency who would work in partnership with Heller’s Associate Dean and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

● Increase resources for graduate students including access to increased stipends, additional years of funding, on-campus housing, and more comprehensive transportation.

● Establish a Center for Community Engagement & Social Justice that will develop innovative curricular and co-curricular initiatives, serve as a hub for training and leadership development, improve town-gown relationships, integrate alumni into students’ experience of service, and express Brandeis’ commitment to being an “extroverted” university.

● Research on peer institutions makes clear that residential colleges are a powerful mechanism for building a sense of community and belonging; creating ties between faculty, staff, and students; integrating the curriculum and the co-curriculum; and developing school spirit. While many faculty expressed significant enthusiasm for this approach, both staff and students find it difficult to imagine how this model could be authentically implemented at Brandeis. The uneven quality of the residence halls is a particular concern for any multi-year residential college model, although peer institutions report that this is not an insurmountable barrier. We suggest that implementing many of the specific recommendations above will serve as an important proof of concept for aspects of a residential college model. For example, building relationships between students and faculty based outside the of the classroom (i.e., by having faculty serve as advisors for residence halls) will demonstrate the possibility of bridging between the academic and co-curricular experience. We believe as the community becomes more aware of what residential colleges are (and what they are not), there may be a shift towards greater support for this model. As part of this process, it will be critical that representatives from Brandeis visit campuses which have successfully made similar changes.
● Some colleges and universities, including Mount Holyoke and MIT, have used intersession terms to build community, and we heard great enthusiasm for this idea from the Board of Trustees. We believe that this may be an effective initiative for Brandeis, but given the resources that it would require, we recommend investing in our residence halls, faculty and staff before implementing an intercession term.

Appendix A

Community Engagement Working Group
Final Report

The Student Learning/Living Experience Task Force was charged with making recommendations that will develop a more holistic community for all our students — one that integrates academic and co-curricular experiences and provides students with a sense of home and belonging on campus. The Community Engagement Working Group has focused on strategies for leveraging the University’s time, space, and commitment to service to support a sense of belonging and community among students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community partners.

Our Working Group’s report highlights a range of recommendations, based on the Task Force’s listening sessions with students, staff, faculty and alumni, the data from the alumni survey, and best practices and inspiring examples from peer institutions. In the first pages of our report, we provide a list of priority recommendations, arranged according to the following tiers:

- **Tier 1** - implementation can be accomplished in a relatively short time frame and without significant new resources
- **Tier 2** - implementation can be accomplished in 2-4 years, with moderate new resources
- **Tier 3** - implementation requires significant planning and investment

Following, we offer many additional recommendations, along with some of the data which support them. We also highlight the importance of ongoing community engagement throughout the Framework process, especially around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Priority Recommendations**

**Tier 1**

- **Time**
  - Add 2-3 days between when upper class students return to campus and the beginning of classes. During this time, which would overlap with Orientation, the University will host multiple all-campus programs which appeal to students, faculty, and staff. A goal of this time should be to establish traditions that support horizontal and vertical connections across the campus community.
  - Establish a specific day for the campus to come together in a shared activity. This might be a day that honors Justice Brandeis, for example.
  - Mark the end of the Spring Semester with a campus wide event that brings people together to celebrate the conclusion of the academic year.

- **Space**
  - As an interim measure, pending a revisioning and redesign of the Usdan Student
Center, remove the wall that separates the dining facility from the rest of the building space.

- **Service**
  - Reframe “breaks” (i.e., times when there are no classes) as opportunities for community engagement, both on campus and beyond. Provide programming that bridges the curriculum and co-curriculum, brings students into Waltham and Boston, and encourages engagement from all members of the campus community. This will require that dining, transportation, and other campus services be enhanced to support students who remain on campus for these activities.

- **Alumni**
  - Establish a yearly “alumni department representative” (ADR) for each major (e.g., departments and programs). This person would serve as an informal career advisor and mentor to majors in the department/program.

**Tier 2**

- **Time**
  - Extend the period of time devoted to Orientation. Add activities focused on academics and/or that integrate academics with other community building activities, so that students are better prepared for a successful engagement with Brandeis and each other. Leverage this time, as well, to better inform incoming students about the array of support structures available to support their health and well-being throughout the year and encourage vertical connections across campus.
  - Establish a 90 minute block, between 11am-5pm, once a week, during which no classes are scheduled. This would be a time for large scale community gatherings and fun events (including “de-stress” events and activities focused on well-being).

- **Service**
  - Establish a “Day of Service” in which Brandeis welcomes members of the Waltham and Greater Boston communities to campus to engage in activities – both fun and serious – that align with the skills of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Such a day might include, for example, musical performances, a Rose Art Museum exhibit, exhibitions in the science labs, college access panels, community partner trainings, cultural experiences, athletic events, youth programming, etc.
  - Move a greater proportion of community based federal work-study lines to the Department of Community Service (DCS) to support students who are either a) working directly with community-based organizations, or; b) the leadership of Waltham Group and who are eligible for federal work study. This will require additional staffing in DCS and additional funding to support engagement by students who are not eligible for work study.
Tier 3

**Space**
- Revision and renovate both the Shapiro Campus Center and the Usdan Student Center. These renovations should be informed by the University’s mission, values, and a clear vision for each space.

**Service**
- Establish a Center for Community Engagement & Social Justice that will develop innovative curricular and co-curricular initiatives, serve as a hub for training and leadership development, integrate alumni into students’ experiences of service, and express Brandeis’ commitment to being an “extroverted” university.

**Time**

Our current calendar provides limited opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to come together and share in activities outside of the classroom. Many feel that community at Brandeis would be enhanced with greater time to develop and engage in rituals and traditions outside of the classroom. The Community Engagement Working Group recommends changes in the calendar that will support the emergence of both more structured (e.g., Winter intercession, activities over breaks, transitions back to campus) and more spontaneous opportunities to come together, both as a community and within important cohorts and identity groups.

**Problem:** During Orientation, too much information is condensed into a short period, followed by an abrupt shift from ‘fun’ to ‘academics.’ Additionally, incoming students in MKTYP, Posse Scholars, athletes, and some international students have separate activities at this time, which create a sense of separation or “silos.” We want orientation to become more of a shared community experience.

**Recommendation:** Extend the period of time devoted to Orientation. Add activities focused on academics and/or that integrate academics with other community building activities, so that students are better prepared for a successful engagement with Brandeis and each other. We also recommend adding Orientation activities that bring in students, staff, and even alumni to welcome first year students to Brandeis, to support intergenerational interaction and vertical connectivity. At the same time, having more time allotted to Orientation also provides an opportunity to better inform incoming students about the array of support structures available to support their health and well-being throughout the year.

We recommend also that Pre-Orientation Programs be made more accessible to students, including adequate financial aid to meet demand. Such programs, if accessible to all students,
could also be the basis for curricular and co-curricular programming that extends into the semester. As an example, see DePaul’s “Chicago Quarter” program.

Extending the length of Orientation would bring us closer to the practices of other elite universities, which offer orientations of the following lengths:

- 4 days (Brown University)
- 7 days (Columbia University)
- 7 days (Dartmouth College)
- 9 days (Harvard University)
- 11 days (Princeton University)
- 13 days (Yale University)

**Problem:** According to the current calendar, upper-class students return to campus, move in, and then start classes the next day. This schedule implies that the purpose of our community is to go to classes. We need a culture shift, embodied in a new calendar, that celebrates the return of our community and gives students the opportunity to set themselves up more holistically for a healthy semester (including buying groceries, unpacking, relationship building with new roommates, etc).

**Recommendation:** Invite upper class students to return to campus 2-3 days before the first day of classes. During this time, which would overlap with Orientation, the University will host multiple all-campus programs which appeal to students and create intergenerational interactions and traditions. This time might also be leveraged to do trainings for returning club or student leaders, rather than scheduling these trainings over a weekend after the semester has begun.

**Problem:** The academic year ends almost as abruptly as it begins. Again, this is a missed opportunity to build a sense of community by marking and celebrating the end of the semester.

**Recommendation:** Establish a set of new rituals/traditions to mark the close of the Spring semester. These rituals should feel celebratory and be available to all community members (students, faculty, staff), and make an explicit effort to build connections between undergraduate and graduate students. Perhaps the Community Break Fast offers a model for an event that supports folks connecting with Brandeis and each other outside of the academic experience. Another example is the Dinner for Six program at Bowdoin college, which could be extended to engage alumni and parents, thereby providing opportunities for dialogue across generations.

**Problem:** During the course of the year, it feels as if there are few opportunities for the community to come together. In part, this is due to conflicting schedules and obligations.
Related, events often overlap, which may decrease their attendance and impact. In part, it is due to the fact that students are so often preparing for their next assignment or exam, filling all of their available time with work.

**Recommendation:** First, we recommend that the University establish a 90 minute block, between 11am-5pm, once a week, during which no classes would be scheduled. This would be a time for large scale community gatherings and fun events (including “de-stress” events and health and well-being focused activities). A scheduling committee would have to coordinate this time, so that programming does not become fragmented and overwhelming. We propose that all events on campus, and particularly events scheduled during this time should be free for students, faculty and staff, to encourage them to participate, thereby strengthening vertical connectivity and community engagement.

Second, we recommend that the University schedule a specific day each year for the campus to come together in a shared activity. Many universities have some variation of this tradition. Some celebrate the founder or namesake of the institution. For example, in 2014, Yale University established a celebratory Founders Day. Washington University in Saint Louis also marks its founding, in a celebration that kicks off a full week of activities. We note that Louis Brandeis’ birthday, November 13, falls at a time in the Fall semester when a break likely would be appreciated.

A variation on this theme would be to establish the tradition of a yearly surprise day off from classes that creates a “snow day mentality” (i.e., it is unexpected and a treat). For planning purposes, faculty and staff would have to be aware of the date, but would not share this information with students. In the tradition of a “Headmaster’s Holiday,” the surprise day off would include campus wide activities to celebrate our students and the mission of the University, and to build school pride through traditions that connect generations of Brandeis community members. These would have to be compelling, so as to engender enthusiasm for the day and discourage folks from using the time to ‘get caught up on work.’ An example, and potential model, is Maine Day at the University of Maine Campus, which focuses explicitly on the campus itself.

We also recommend consideration of a January intercession, as a time when students, faculty, and staff could come together to develop interests not strictly limited to coursework. MIT’s Independent Activities Period is a four week intercession, during which “members of the MIT community (students, faculty, staff, and alums)...organize, sponsor and participate in a wide variety of activities, including how-to sessions, forums, athletic endeavors, lecture series, films, tours, recitals and contests.” Reed College offers a week long Paideia, just before the start of the Spring semester, during which “Hundreds of workshops are led by students, alumni, staff, and professors, and are open to the entire Reed community.”
**Problem:** Breaks from classes (e.g., during Thanksgiving, February, April, etc.) are times when students can come together as a community or in cohorts to take a break from studies, explore the local area, and/or or engage in career or service oriented opportunities. Some students prefer not to return home for personal or financial reasons. This is particularly true for our international student population. Food services, transportation, programming and access to other university resources are limited during this time and they are not leveraged for community engagement.

**Recommendation:** We recommend the reframing of “breaks” as opportunities for community engagement, both on campus and beyond. This will require the provision of adequate support services for students who remain on campus, including dining, transportation, etc., and effective communication about these resources (see, for example, this model from Reed College).

The University could also develop additional programming programming for students who wish to leave campus. For example, [James Madison University](http://www.jmu.edu) has an extensive array of alternative spring break volunteer programs. A local model that could be expanded is the Studio Arts major, which offers “Weekend Retreats,” during which small cohorts of students and faculty engage in topics such as ‘Landscaping Painting in NH,” or “Art Museums in New York City.” To ensure equitable access, University funding should be available to cover the cost of such opportunities. Additionally, programs should be carefully curated and staffed to address issues of risk management and “voluntourism”.

**Space**

Social infrastructure – that is, the space that people need to gather and interact with each other – is an essential aspect of building social networks and cohesion. Building community and a sense of belonging at Brandeis will be supported by efforts to adapt and evolve current spaces and facilities across campus, as well as intentionally creating new ones. A clear priority is making the entire campus, and its physical infrastructure more inclusive (e.g., gender neutral bathrooms in all buildings) and fully accessible to all students. Additionally, we recognize that having additional space would make more feasible some of the recommendations made above re: “time” (e.g., having a weekly time during which no classes are scheduled).

**Problem:** When it was built, Shapiro Campus Center (SCC) was meant to serve as the center of the campus. However, many find it to be a loud and socially isolating space, in large part due to its layout. Related, the culture of the SCC is undefined and many students are not sure if it is

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meant to be a loud (social) or quiet (study) space. For example, the SCC contains a computer lab, library, and TV lounge. The TV lounge is often used for studying, rather than being identified as a space for social engagement. Likewise, many feel that its hours for conference room use (Monday–Friday: 10am–11:30pm. Saturday and Sunday: 2pm–11:30pm) are limiting, especially for students who would like to study there late at night. More broadly, many see the SCC as failing to communicate the University’s mission and/or values.

**Recommendation**: We recommend a revisioning and renovation of the Shapiro Campus Center. While the explicit goals of this renovation would have to be determined in a focused design process, we anticipate that they would include increasing the space available to all members of the campus community, creating some quieter/private “nooks” for conversations, adding elements that make the SCC feel “cozy” and welcoming, providing students with a relaxing location to for social engagement. Related, we recommend doing a time study to identify the optimum hours of operation for all space (including conference rooms and Einstein’s) in the SCC, both now and in the future.

**Problem**: Usdan no longer functions as a vibrant student center. The space is segmented in ways that deter students from viewing it as a place to gather and be together.

**Recommendation**: Remove the wall that separates the dining facility from the rest of the building space. Add additional locations where community members can gather to talk, study, and attend programs. The building has turned into a ‘functional space’ with offices and resources, but needs intentional renovations that engage and support students.

For both the SCC and Usdan, any forthcoming (re)design processed should be informed by the University’s mission, values, and a clear vision for each space. For example, based on our interview data, there are two ways to conceive of these sorts of buildings: 1) as student centers, where the goal is really about creating a student (typically undergrad) hub. A student center typically has centralized programming, and tries to give students a leadership role in these spaces. It typically houses student organizations, student events, concerts, comedians, etc.

Student centers are a great place for student jobs; 2) as campus centers, where the space is intentionally designed to bring lots of people from all generations together. At the moment, the SCC and Usdan buildings combine, for unclear reasons, these two functions, making it hard for them to accomplish either goal. We assume that one would become a student center, while the other would serve as a campus center.

Centers nominated by interviewees as exemplary for building community include the following:
• Davidson College - Knobloch Campus Center
• Williams College - Paresky Center
• University of Vermont - Dudley Davis Student Center
• Princeton University - Frist Campus Center

Rice University’s Student Center would also be an interesting case study for a design process, as it accompanies a residential college model. Another example worthy of study, for its student-centered focus and intentionality of design, is St. Olaf College’s Buntrock Commons. The St. Olaf website mentions being influenced by materials/information from ACUI – a professional organization that focuses on campus centers and student activities.

As a smaller point, we note that redesigning campus spaces provides an opportunity for branding with school colors and mascots.

**Problem:** There are few spaces in the residence halls where a large number of students can gather to be social. In some areas the walls are thin, increasing the incidence of complaints about noise. This is part of why students are going off-campus for social life, which arguably increases risk to students and jeopardizes the University’s relationship with the City of Waltham.

**Recommendations:** We need to build new structures or renovate existing structures to provide spaces for students to interact socially, cook and share meals, study, and destress. Additional spaces outside of the residence halls, such as the Stein should be renovated and/or relocated to a shared campus space like the SCC/Usdan. There is significant enthusiasm for cafe-like environments, where students, staff, and faculty could work and be social. Related, many students have requested 24 hour “drop in” food service, which might be located in these spaces.

Such spaces also could be sites for programs, whether led by staff or students. Ideally, programs in these spaces would provide a festive atmosphere, while providing safe and comfortable environment during hours when students are seeking those opportunities.

**Problem:** Students spend a tremendous amount of time in the library, likely because it is one of the only comfortable spaces available to them for both studying and socializing. Practically, this means that the Library is being asked to serve multiple needs, as a center for research, instruction, studying, and campus social life.

**Recommendation:** Moving forward, a clear vision for the library is imperative. If it is to remain a social hub on campus, then space should be allocated and updated accordingly. If it is to be refocused on the academic mission of the university, then then space should be allocated and updated accordingly. In either case, we suggest that some space in the library communicate
values associated with health and wellness. This as an area where additional input from staff, students, and faculty is necessary.

**Problem:** Students are moving off-campus due to the lack of housing on-campus, the perception that there isn’t enough housing and/or the requirement for meal plans that many students see as expensive and not matched to their needs and preferences. When students move-off campus it also increases the social activities that happen off-campus.

**Recommendation:** On-campus housing should be guaranteed for all undergraduates. Options for graduate student housing should be developed, especially as they can support intergenerational interactions. Meal plan options and requirements should be reviewed and made more flexible and responsive to student demand. The dining halls should be revisioned as a place where students can gather and socialize. Given the strong associations between food and culture, the dining halls also offer important, as yet unrealized opportunities for celebrating our diverse campus community through respectful and well-informed food-focused programming and events.

**Service**

Brandeis has a long and distinguished history of community engagement. Community service is a key expression of the University’s commitment to social justice – as a practice – and a keystone of our relationship with the City of Waltham.

That said, our focus on service could be broadened and strengthened in significant ways. Among the goals of the Community Engagement Working Group were to identify mechanisms for building bridges between the curriculum and co-curriculum, consolidating and strengthening the University’s strategies for community engagement (in Waltham, Boston, and beyond), and providing inclusive and accessible program engagement for faculty, students, staff, alumni and community partners.

**Problem:** The Neustadt report identifies “social justice” as a high priority of Brandeis students. Yet, there is no centralized infrastructure on campus to support social justice practices at Brandeis, leading students (and their families, as well as faculty and staff) to doubt the University’s social justice commitments. Comparisons with local institutions, including Brown, Bentley, and Tufts, suggest that, despite a thriving culture of community service, Brandeis is a generation behind in its institutional support for community engaged research, teaching, and service.

**Recommendation:** Establish a Center for Community Engagement & Social Justice that will develop innovative curricular and co-curricular initiatives, serve as a hub for training and
leadership development, integrate alumni into students’ experiences of service, and express Brandeis’ commitment to being an “extroverted” university. We note that several such centers serve also as a site for meeting the “broader impact” requirements of federal granting agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation) and have served as successful loci for external fund raising.

To be successful, this center must be adequately staffed. In interviews with the directors of centers at peer institutions, they emphasized the importance of having Ph.D.s leading curricular initiatives, for example. How such a center could be linked to Brandeis’ founding values, including its connections to Jewish traditions, such as tikkun olam, is an important topic for conversation among the campus community and our local partners.

We recognize that establishing a center will take significant time and resources. We suggest a variety of actions below that will be important interim measures.

**Background:** The Waltham Group, founded in 1966, is a unique and important aspect of Brandeis University. A volunteer community service organization, run entirely by students, it supports thousands of students doing outreach programs on campus, in Waltham and in the Greater Boston community. As noted on the Waltham Group website, “through its tutorial, recreational, mentoring and other programs, the Waltham Group responds to the needs of the community and is a center for service and advocacy.” The Waltham Group is a powerful example, also, of how community engagement can support students as they develop skills and knowledge that will serve them well in their careers and as engaged citizens.

**Problem:** The Waltham Group is an entirely student-run organization. Consequently, the funding for this work varies from year-to-year; it relies upon the Student Union’s funding process, which is run by a different group of students each year. This negatively impacts the Department of Community Service’s ability to develop clear long-term plans and support of the organizations (i.e., due to SAF funding restrictions).

**Recommendation:** The Department of Community Service should a) have an operating expense budget that supports our current and future co-curricular student-led, community engaged initiatives including, but not limited to the Waltham Group and/or; b) funds through SAF should be made available upon need and request and supported by an increased minimum allocation to the Waltham Group.

**Problem:** There is nearly no coordination between the work of the Waltham Group or other student-lead service clubs, and the academic mission of the University. Students have limited opportunities for integrating their service work with their studies or receiving academic credit
for their service. This is a missed opportunity for connecting two strengths of the University – its academic programs and the Waltham Group.

Related, although the Waltham Group has a strong, positive presence in the community, these efforts are student led and represent only one sector of the University. Brandeis needs to formalize its “brand” in the local community. Our co-educators and community partners are have expressed interest in a variety of resources that could be provided by the University (e.g., beyond student volunteers providing direct service). For example, community-based organizations with which we currently partner would be interested in collaborations that include working with faculty and/or classes on grant writing, tech support, marketing, website development, consulting, board development, etc.

**Recommendation:** Build infrastructure, perhaps initially in the form of a staff position, to make connections between the university’s academic program and its community service initiatives. Provide incentives for faculty to include community engagement in their research and teaching (i.e., targeted funds to support community engaged research and/or teaching; including community engagement in annual activity reports; “counting” community engagement as an aspect of university service in tenure and promotion decisions).

**Problem:** Currently, the majority of Federal Community-Based Work-Study resources support student workers at the Lemberg Center. Currently there are 107 work-study students at the Lemberg Center and only 7 at other community-based organizations. That is ~93% of community based federal work study positions are being used on campus, which dramatically reduces resources available to support students’ community engagement beyond the campus. Related, because the Waltham Group is a volunteer organization, with students receiving neither academic credit nor financial compensation for their time, participation may not be equally accessible to all of our students.

**Recommendation:** Move community based work-study lines to the Department of Community Service. These funds will support students who are either a) working directly with community based organizations, or; b) leaders of the Waltham Group or other service based clubs, who are eligible for federal work study. This will also require additional staffing in DCS to supervise students and support collaboration with community partners. Over time, we hope to generate additional funding to support students who are not eligible for work study to ensure all student leaders are being compensated for their community engaged work.

**Problem:** Although Brandeis faculty, staff and students are engaged in the local community, our unique mission, values, and contributions are not well defined, communicated, or understood. At the same time, many students don’t feel very connected to Waltham as a community and/or home to Brandeis University.
**Recommendation:** Brandeis can improve town-gown relationships by sharing resources from campus to folks outside of Brandeis. This is a goal of many of the recommendations we outline in this section. In addition to strengthening students’ sense of connection to each other and with alumni, faculty, and staff, service can strengthen their connection to Waltham.

One way that universities often try to do this is through a “Day of Service.” While these may serve the goals of the University, such days typically overwhelm community-based organizations, often adding to their costs because of the intensive staffing and preparation they require. At the same time, they do not align well with the ongoing needs of organizations.

Therefore, we propose establishing a day (name to be determined – perhaps One Brandeis/One Waltham) during which Brandeis welcomes members of the Waltham and Greater Boston communities to campus to engage in activities – both fun and serious – that align with the skills of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Such a day might include, for example, musical performances, a Rose Art Museum exhibit, exhibitions in the science labs, college access panels, community partner trainings, cultural experiences, athletic events, youth programming, etc. Alternatively, it could build on and extend the Festival of the Arts. An example, with very different content, is the UC Davis Field Day.

In addition, getting our students out into Waltham special events is essential to being active members of the community and capitalizing on the vibrant programming of our city. This could be as simple as establishing intentional relationships with the Waltham Library, local coffee shops, or other venues that can serve as community-based extensions of our campus.

In the long term, Brandeis could consider purchasing property on Moody Street where faculty, staff, and students can engage with the community. The center, similar to Elon Downtown Community Center, Northeastern Crossing, or Stonehill’s College Downtown Center for Community Engagement would provide a community space for Waltham residents to gather, a communal meeting space, a location for faculty lectures, and community resources that are part of curricular or co-curricular programs. Examples of programs that could be hosted there include adult English classes, after-school tutoring, computer literacy, and/or the maker lab. This would provide a significant tangible connection between the main campus and the community.

**Problem:** Unlike the many universities that leverage their residence halls as sites for facilitating community engagement (e.g., a hall might partner, for a year, on a specific community service project or with a community-based organization), Brandeis does not have a consistent practice of making connections between residential life and community based
programs. This is a significant missed opportunity, especially given how many students come to Brandeis with strong commitments to social justice.

**Recommendation**: Use residential halls as a focus for building sustainable partnerships with the local community. How this would be done will depend on the recommendations of the Residential Life Working Group. In any event, there is some precedent for this at Brandeis; Partnerships for Civic Engagement (PCE) at Brandeis was a strong partnership between Community Living and Department of Community Service which built a shared community and fostered student leaders to engage in service in leadership roles while at Brandeis. This model also provides opportunities for vertical connectivity, as faculty, staff, graduate students, and alumni could serve as mentors and/or facilitators of these projects. Lastly, we note that with greater involvement from faculty, such projects could be linked to credit bearing courses. This would both deepen student learning, and make community engagement more accessible to students from diverse economic backgrounds.

**Alumni**

**Problem**: Alumni are not as connected as they or the University would like. We too frequently miss opportunities to connect students with our alumni, across the globe. There are too few opportunities for alumni to return to campus to engage with the community.

**Recommendations**: Establish a yearly “alumni department representative” (ADR) for each major (e.g., departments and programs). This person would serve as an informal career advisor and mentor to majors in the department/program.

Invite alumni to serve as advisors for clubs and participate in a variety of opportunities including service alternative break programs, guest lectures, athletic competitions, mock interviews, internship supervisors, etc. Homecoming could be expanded to appeal to a wide variety of alumni, including but not limited to varsity athletes. As example, [Bowdoin college](https://www.bowdoin.edu) has lectures and craft beer tasting and [Emory](https://www.emory.edu) has faculty lectures musical performances, structured networking events, cultural group gatherings and more during their homecoming weekends.

Programs like [Tisch College Summer Program](https://www.tisch.brandeis.edu/programs/summer-programs) are a model for connecting students to alumni in their home cities.

**Other Recommendations Related to Community Engagement**
**Problem:** There are significant communication gaps on campus, and students, faculty, staff, alumni and even off campus community members often are unaware of available resources and programming.

**Recommendation:** Brandeis needs a communications platform that advertises events and is accessible via mobile devices so that it will be used by folks across the institution. Additionally, this should make clear which events are open to the public.

**Problem:** We have received numerous complaints about transportation options, which are seen as inaccessible and unreliable. For students living off-campus, transportation is a critical resource, shaping the extent to which they feel connected to campus. For all students, transportation is important to their safety in traveling from campus to Waltham, Cambridge, and Boston.

**Recommendation:** Increase the hours, availability, and resources of the Bran Van Transportation System, including extending weekend and weekday shuttles into Boston and providing coverage during breaks. Use this transportation to encourage attendance at large Boston based events such as Sporting events, conferences, theater performances, volunteer 5K walks, etc. Consideration should be made to align transportation with the City of Waltham and Bentley University to share funding and extend the routes.

**Problem:** Currently, we are not leveraging important moments – such as admission to the University – to communicate our mission and values and to generate school pride.

**Recommendation:** Revisit and reassess the entire trajectory of how students engage with the University, and identify key moments to communicate our mission, values, and priorities across the student learning/living experience (i.e., academics, but also community engagement, etc.). As one example, if we wish to change the University’s culture re: double and triple majors, this should not be “pitched” as an advantage of Brandeis during admissions tours. Related, we should be certain that messaging about the benefits of a Brandeis education (e.g., access to research positions in labs) are consistently and equitable available to students who matriculate.

We also see these moments as opportunities to orient students to sources of school identity and spirit. A fun way to do this might include sending admitted students a ‘Brandeis Bucket List,’ which would provide them with a listing, generated from student nominations, of 100 top things to do at Brandeis/in Waltham. Then, during Orientation, time could be provided for O-groups to begin working their way through the list.
Conclusion

In addition to the specific problems and recommendations identified by the Community Engagement Working Group, we also consistently heard concerns and suggestions pertaining to three overarching themes. In a real way, these are relevant to every situation which we’ve described above. As such, we see them as absolutely essential to the goals which have guided and informed our work.

First, a clear theme across the conversations within and beyond our group has been that Brandeis needs to invest resources into additional staff and faculty, as well as improving the physical plant. Many members of our community are concerned that the Framework will raise expectations without providing adequate resources. They respond to new proposals with skepticism, because they have for so long been asked to do more with less (and less…). This perpetuates the norm that we are all about “getting by” rather than achieving inclusive excellence. Recruitment efforts, for both faculty and staff, should reflect the priorities embodied in the Framework, while bringing to Brandeis people with the expertise our mission requires.

Second, the community engagement and data collection process undertaken by the Task Force should be embedded in an ongoing and iterative process. Many members of the community report that they do not feel heard and believe that their perspectives are not taken into account by University leaders. Every possible change being recommended in this Working Group report, and others, has implications for all members of our community. We have heard significant concerns about how these recommendations will be received and implemented. It will strengthen community cohesion, engagement, and spirit, if more members of the community are engaged in ongoing planning and evaluation for all aspects of the student learning and living experience at Brandeis. We note that a possible model for this is the Council on the Student Experience, which is part of the Provost’s Office at the University of Toronto.

Last, but certainly not least, it is critical that the next steps of the Framework process affirm, not only in words but in deeds, that diversity, equity, and inclusion are core commitments of the University. We appreciate that there is a different Working Group making specific recommendations on this topic, as it pertains to the Foundational Values of the University. As we have listened to over 50 groups of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, we also feel a powerful obligation to make clear that these are urgent and central concerns in our community. Moreover, they are directly related to the very possibility of many of the recommendations we’ve offered here. Students who are hungry or who have experienced racial profiling in their residence halls, for example, cannot reasonably be expected to enthusiastically participate in a Founder’s Day celebration. As such, there can be no question
that the successful implementation of the changes we suggest – and, indeed, the overarching project of building community and a sense of belonging at Brandeis – depends on greater institutional attention to how issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion shape the student learning and living experience at Brandeis.

This report reflects the dedication and hard work of the members of the Community Engagement Working Group: Jennifer Cleary, Michelle Kim, Lucas Malo (co-chair), Meredith Monaghan, Matt Nadler, Hannah Nicholson, Sara Shostak (co-chair), J.V. Souffrant, Mark Surchin, and Seth Winberg.
Appendix B

Brandeis University--Residential Life Working Group Recommendations

The Student Learning and Living Task Force was formed to determine how to improve the undergraduate and graduate experience for all students and to create a sense of belonging on campus. The Residential Life working group has developed a tiered set of recommendations as well as three main needs that have surfaced in our research. The three needs we have established are as follows:

1. Bring together faculty, staff and students. Promoting a sense of community responsibility.
2. Construction of modern residential facilities that incorporate all aspects of modern higher education
3. Define student learning outside of the classroom that will link back to a central mission.

Our full report highlights a wide range of recommendations both inside the and outside the residential communities. Below is a summary of our recommendations based on the following criteria:

- **Immediate Goals, Modest Resources**: Goals that can be completed in short time with small or manageable resource allocation. (<2 year estimation)
- **Intermediate Goals, Moderate Resources**: Goals that can be completed with advanced planning that may take at least one academic year to plan. The resources required to accomplish these goals would need higher investment that the “Immediate Goal, Modest Resource tier.” (2-4 year estimation) The allocation of resources is moderate including but not limited to: additional human resources, and minor capital improvements.
- **Long-Term Goals, Significant Resources**: Goals that require significant long-term collaborative planning. In many cases this type of planning requires multiple campus departments and teams. The allocation of resources is high including but not limited to: additional human resources, major capital projects, and long-term construction. (3-5 year estimation)

**Summary of Goals from Residence Life Working Group**

Our working group has decided to intentionally reverse the order from:

1. Immediate Goals, Modest Resources
2. Intermediate Goals, Moderate Resources
3. Long-Term Goals, Significant Resources, to

1. Long-Term Goals, Significant Resources
2. Intermediate Goals, Moderate Resources
3. Immediate Goals, Modest Resources

The goals were reordered to place importance on the value of long-term investment vs. short term satisfaction. The working group strongly believes that long-term planning shows a great deal of investment and commitment on the University’s behalf, that quick fix short-term goals
simply do not achieve. The focus on overall student wellness and student satisfaction as it relates to basic needs are critical to the success of any community building process.

The following goals reflect the importance of the Long-Term Goals:

**Long-Term Goals, Significant Resources**
- Recommendation 1: Build and renovate residence halls that are modern and welcoming. Significant capital improvements to the campus as it exists and an investment in new facilities that satisfy the needs of the Brandeis Community.

**Intermediate Goals, Moderate Resources**
- Recommendation 1: Developing a residential curriculum that maps to the central mission that is created as a result of this project.
- Recommendation 2: Create and implement plans to make the academic and physical campus accessible to community members (social, physical, and administrative).

**Immediate Goals, Modest Resources**
- Recommendation 1: Review the Accurent Report and make critical decisions about expanding, and adding study space, social space, and office space onto current viable facilities.
- Recommendation 2: Develop learning outcomes that inform the establishment of a residential curriculum. The learning outcomes must involve an interdisciplinary panel of campus partners. (academic affairs, student affairs, faculty, and staff)
- Recommendation 3: Leverage the Brandeis Core and the First Year Experience as an opportunity to engage programming inside current residential spaces.
- Recommendation 4: Acknowledge that in developing plans for physical spaces, student physical and mental health is a primary consideration.

**Full Report**

The Student Learning and Living Task Force was formed to determine how to improve the undergraduate and graduate experience for all students and to create a sense of belonging on campus. With this charge, the Residential Life working group could have approached its work in two ways. The first would be to narrowly consider residential life as representing only the residence halls and the work of the Department of Community Living. Rather than taking this approach, we decided that given the larger charge of fostering a sense of belonging as well as intergenerational involvement in living and advising communities, we would define the charge of the Residence Life Working Group to include what it means to live within a larger community.

If one thinks about how adults make their residential choices, these decisions are not based only on the physical structures in which they reside. Rather, one's living experience includes the neighborhood they live in, the ease of transportation, the neighbors that a person has, the amenities of the community in which they reside, and the culture of the neighborhood in which
they reside. Therefore, our report makes recommendations about building structures, dining structures, transportation, how to form communities, and related areas.

The following list is an initial composition of problems and recommendations by area as well as components of the feedback and research conducted in each area. It is important to recognize that there the opinions of the group were as diverse as its members. While this is a summary report, there are many areas in which there was a lack of consensus in the group about whether or not a problem existed as well as the best approach to address any perceived problems.

Space and Culture: A Framework for Our Work

Overarching Problem #1: A Lack of Modern and Welcoming Residence Halls
There was consensus that across the university, the availability of space for academic and social events is highly limited. Students report not wanting to study in their rooms because of the quality of the facilities. They raise concerns that there are not enough study spaces for small groups, and larger spaces for social events. Because of a lack of spaces throughout the university, the library functions as both an academic and a social space, and it is often overcrowded. This lack of adequate space, particularly social spaces, messages to our students that they should only be studying, and that the university does not value social interactions which build community. If students are to feel valued as individuals who contribute a wide range of academic and personal experiences to the community, there must be physical structures that allow them to build both academic and social relationships.

Overarching Problem #2: A Culture of Enforcement
There was a lack of consensus in the Working Group of whether or not students experience Brandeis as a culture of enforcement rather than a culture of development and support. At least one Working Group member felt that the idea of a culture of enforcement did not rise to the level of this report. In the listening tours, students regularly discuss how they are written up by their Community Advisors for noise complaints, how they are yelled at in the dining halls as they learn to navigate the kosher options in Sherman, and how the University Police have a tradition of enforcement rather than community policing. In the Student Listening Tours, students spoke about how this culture of enforcement is part of the reason that our students are moving off campus, and/or they are turning to fraternities and sororities to provide community and support. Students who are from groups underrepresented in the Brandeis community (students of color, first-generation college students, low-income students, international students), report that they regularly experience being stereotyped, experiences which include staff making assumptions about their honesty and integrity and having their voices silenced. However, the data from the Skyfactor indicated that students felt safe in their residence halls, had a sense of community, and generally had a positive experience. In the Skyfactor comments, students said that the University does not do an adequate job of enforcing policies like quiet hours and violations of drug use. We must value both the qualitative data provided by the listening tour and the quantitative date provided by Skyfactor and determine how to navigate these competing narratives.

Overarching Problem #3: A Lack of a Shared Vision of the Brandeis Experience
The Working Group was in consensus that Brandeis has no unified message of what our education means, what the values for our community should be, and what positively defines the
Student Experience. We cannot develop integrated programming and experiences for students if we do not know what we intend for them to learn. Currently, different departments have different sets of values which are communicated to students to varying degrees and programming can seem to be random. There is also variation in what is communicated within departments; for example, academic advisors report hearing the new Brandeis Core explained three different ways in their visits to Admissions. Some departments have a communications person in their office (Hiatt, Student Affairs) while others do not (Academic Services, ODEI). The result is that we have an abundance of good information, but with no unified messaging, it sounds like noise. The most prevalent message in our community is that what makes Brandeis special is that students can have multiple majors and minors, and the more this becomes an expectation, the more academic pressure that students experience. Just as there is a lack of shared vision, there is a lack of formal assessment of the student experience.

Overarching Problem #4: A Belief that Community Means Only Being with People who are Exactly Like You
In the listening tours, we regularly asked students what would foster a greater sense of community at Brandeis. Much to our surprise, the consistent answer was to develop community such that individuals were surrounded by others who were exactly like them. For example, athletes suggested being housed together in a single residence halls, while UDRs thought that living communities arranged by major would be helpful. In reflecting on our experiences in college as well as the neighborhoods that we currently reside, the more diverse our neighbors, businesses, and volunteer opportunities, the richer our community. We also recognize that the ability to navigate difference is a learned skill. Many of our students come from homogenous schools and backgrounds, and while it is normal to seek comfort from being with people who are like you, learning and growth occurs when you engage in an experience with people who are different than you. We are suggesting that we provide guidance and support for students when they are in environments that require them to stretch to understand and appreciate differences while at the same time offering some opportunities for groups of individuals with similar interests.

Overarching Problem #5: Few Links Between the Academic and the Co-Curricular Life
Students experience their academic life as completely separate from their residential and co-curricular life. They rarely see faculty outside of class, office hours and lab. In one listening tour, as we floated the idea of a residential college model, one student athlete said, “Never mind them living with us--I just want them to come to my games.” Just as academic advising needs to be rethought, so too do the connections between academic and co-curricular life. Similarly, students and alumni would like more interactions between each other.

These five overarching problems shaped our recommendations for the Residential Life Working Group.

Residence Life/Community Living
Problem: Most of our residence halls have outlived their projected lifespan. As a result, major systems (heating, plumbing, etc.) are failing. In addition, many of our buildings lack adequate soundproofing, such that a student watching a movie in their own room may be subject to a noise complaint thus continuing the culture of enforcement over community building. Faculty, staff,
and students believes that the quality of the residence halls significantly impacts the perception of the Brandeis experience as a whole.

**Recommendation:** The Working Group was unanimous in recommending substantial renovation and capital improvements to residential facilities. This work is critical to students having a sense that Brandeis University cares for their well-being. If a student does not have heat in their room or if their bathroom repeatedly floods, their basic needs are not being met.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:

- An assessment of critical building functions should be conducted annually. Students should not be moved into buildings in which major systems are not fully functional.
- Building systems need attention in all facilities, HVAC, plumbing, ADA door opening equipment.
- Soundproofing and insulation are needed in multiple areas. When soundproofing cannot be installed, the university could pilot having “quiet” floors and “social” floors. Currently, policies are driven by students who want quieter living arrangements, so they can focus on their work thus having the unintended consequence of potentially limiting social life.
- Buildings need to be retrofitted for accessibility. Too often students with documented disabilities are isolated from their friends because of a lack of accessible housing.
- Restroom facilities are lacking, and there is a shortage in Gender Neutral / Gender Inclusive / All Gender restrooms.
  - Comprehensive evaluation of ADA compliance with the opportunity to retrofit as many locations as possible.
  - Add more Gender Inclusive restroom facilities in all facilities.
- Laundry is a major student complaint, and a new laundry system will be installed in the residence halls during Summer 2019.

**Problem:** Housing and the availability of housing is a major source of stress for students. In the listening tours, several individuals described the housing selection process as “The Hunger Games.” Students and alumni reported losing friendships in the process of room selection, and faculty note that students are under increased stress during this time and are distracted from their academic work.

**Recommendation:** Alumni in particular thought that quality housing options should be guaranteed for all four years. When older residence halls are replaced, the number of beds needs to increase. If there is the opportunity to build additional residence halls, this should be a priority of the university. The Working Group recognizes this is an aspirational goal that will take significant time and resources to achieve.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:

- If quality housing is available for all four years, at least one working group member believes that Brandeis should move to a system in which the number of students who live off campus is restricted so as to further build community. Many liberal arts colleges place limits on the number of students who can live in off-campus housing.
• Whether or not additional housing stock is available, sophomores should be required to live on campus because of factors related to social isolation and academic struggle. Only juniors and seniors should be able to live off campus.

• Brandeis should explore an alternate method of room selection. Currently every student is given a number, the lower the number provides the first choices and high numbers draw last. Students with lower numbers and planning on a suite gather their friends to draw the suite of their choice. However, a group may have planned for a suite of a certain size, and then that suite size is no longer available causing last minute additions to or reductions from housing groups and straining friendships. Instead, Brandeis should ask students to identify if they would like a single, a double, a three person, four person, or five person suite. The group is then given a single number. As a group they then select the corresponding space in which they would like to live. The Working Group was not in consensus about this change as some students have expressed liking the current system.

Problem: The majority of our residential buildings were constructed at a time when there were very different ideas about how communities are formed on college campuses. At that time, residence halls were meant to be places where people slept, and it was thought that community should be developed in other centralized spaces. As a result, the majority of our residence halls do not have community building spaces. Even newer buildings such as Skyline faced changes in design including the elimination of a faculty in residence suite and a reduction in social and academic spaces.

Recommendation: The Working Group was unanimous in agreeing that our best functioning residence halls provide common areas, air conditioning, workout rooms, small study spaces, larger spaces for social gatherings, and work out facilities. Even if there are fewer living spaces for students on campus, we believe these types of building amenities are critical to developing a sense of community. The Working Group was also unanimous in agreeing that students should be involved in the planning process for any changes to residence halls.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:
• Create clean, comfortable and modern common spaces.
• Add study spaces with room to spread out and collaborate.
• Develop large common rooms for academic and/or social events with flexible setups and efficient air conditioning and heating.
• Add modern cardiovascular workout facilities featuring select approved free weights.
• Have media displays in every residence hall. Media displays should feature signature events at the university (Gittler Prize, marque athletics games, events specific to the residence halls) as well as important notifications (room inspections, how to reserve space)
• Establish an administrative office or offices that can be shared by student-centered resources (community advisors, area coordinators, academic advisors, community-based therapists, Hiatt staff) and which allow for other in-hall community programming.
• Establish an annual fund for each residence hall to have a “beautification project.” Students in the hall determine what they would like to request each year in order to improve the space. This builds student unity within a hall, ensures that students are able
to make suggestions about the space they live in, and leads to continual investment in making the space more student friendly.

- All spaces should also be fitted with efficient air conditioning and heating.

**Problem:** Programming in the Residence Halls is not a unifying experience. Community Living had developed a curriculum with stated learning objectives, but attendance varies from hall to hall. The Working Group was supportive of the need for institutional-level goals and learning outcomes for co-curricular life including what values are central to a Brandeis education. From there, we can create a curriculum that mirrors these goals in the residence halls, as well as in other student service areas.

**Recommendation:** Community Living has a standardized year-long curriculum which includes four signature events: resume writing with Hiatt, bystander intervention training with PARC, navigating campus with the University Police, and Student Activities. This framework could be modified to include academic advising, nutrition, wellness programming, and faculty lectures. If attendance could be improved, there are opportunities for vertical connections with faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduates, and alumni.

The feedback received by the Task Force suggests several other initiatives that would help foster connections and a sense of belonging among our students:

- Develop a full curriculum with learning goals and assessment which includes academic and non-academic components.
- Link each residence hall with a Waltham Group initiative to develop a shared sense of purpose in the hall and to celebrate our social justice mission. While not every student might choose to participate in community engagement activities, it provides an easy way to make connections, both on campus and beyond.
- Link each residence hall with a varsity athletics team. The hall becomes the official cheering/school spirit support for that team. Again, not all students will participate, but it provides opportunity for athletes and non-athletes to build connections with each other.
- Explore having other themes--either formally or informally--such as climate change or cooking from around the world.

**Problem:** The NCHA survey data indicates that students at Brandeis who responded to the survey experience feelings of isolation and anxiety. In addition, one of the main reasons that parents contact the Director of Family Engagement is because they are concerned about the social isolation of their student. Students regularly report wanting more of a feeling of community on campus and with their peers.

**Recommendation:** Perceptions about the residential college model varied according to committee member. Some committee members showed strong support for the model, while others felt that it would not work well for our campus. (See appendix for additional information.) We should better research the residence hall models that are being enacted at Vanderbilt, Rice, and Middlebury. There may be modified ways of alternating these structures to create something Brandeisian. This will take time to develop and will, in part, be predicated on having the appropriate facilities including renovated or rebuilt residence halls.
It is important to note that when we discussed the residential college model with students, there were high levels of resistance. The hesitation was two-fold. First, students did not want faculty “in their space” as they felt this would be a violation of privacy. When we discussed faculty being in an adjacent or affiliated space, and that they would oversee programming for students, there was more interest. Second, students were concerned that the plan to have students from different class years living together was an attempt by the university to further restrict social life. The Working Group would like there to be a more vibrant social life on campus, and at other campuses, residential colleges have been central to promoting the hall as a place to socialize with others.

When we discussed the idea of a residential college with the Alumni Board, they were generally supportive of it. Many members of the alumni board reported that when they attended Brandeis, they lived in the same residence hall for all four years, and they enjoyed the friendships that they made with students who not in their class year. Other alumni spoke favorably of how much access they had to faculty and staff, with one alumni recalling that he had an intellectual debate with Abe Sacher. Alumni were concerned about a residential college system given the quality of our current housing stock.

Members of the Working Group did not reach consensus about whether or not they believed that a residential college model could work at Brandeis. Some Working Group members thought that if we updated our facilities, there would be no need for a residential college model. Other Working Group members strongly supported a full adoption of the residential college system using Yale as a model. The following are ideas that were generated in the course of our discussion and listening tours.

- Having faculty associated with residence halls could take three forms.  
  Option 1: Create a Faculty in Residence (FIR) Housing Initiative. In this initiative, there would be a complete gut renovation of 567 South Street Residence Hall to offer “on campus” housing to faculty members who are assigned into the Faculty in Residence program. The faculty who live at 567 will be assigned a residence hall for which they are responsible.  
  Option 2: Create faculty houses or apartments adjacent to the residence halls. Rather than being centralized in one building, faculty would live near the residence hall for which they are responsible.  
  Option 3: Follow the model used by Bowdoin College, in which faculty apply for a formal position that includes advising and developing community events for a particular residence hall. In this model, there is a formal job description, learning outcomes, and curriculum, but the faculty members do not live in the residence halls. Option 3 would be the easiest to implement in a short time frame with more limited resources.

- Create programming space that establishes a flexible community space that can be used for faculty programming and other programs when not in use.

- When faculty were asked about the residential life experience of our students, many said that they knew nothing about the residence halls. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group thought in order to develop horizontal connections across different parts of the university, it may be helpful to establish a Faculty Advisory committee within Community Living
and/or Student Affairs. Models for this type of committee include the Faculty Advisory Committee to Athletics and the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Transitional Year Program. Academic Affairs should also participate in this committee.

- Have planned activities and services for breaks, intercession, and summer.
- Housing for graduate students remains a common concern, and in the listening tours with graduate students, many graduate students requested housing on campus. Using the Posse Program as a model of developing vertical connections between graduate students and undergraduates, we could pilot a Graduate Student in Residence program to enhance community development.
- In the listening tours, several staff members described Brandeis as once having “Living and Learning” programs in the first year residence halls. From the staff members’ perspective, these were seen as successful, particularly for first-year students. They described the first-year living-learning communities as something that could be randomly assigned or application based.
- At least one member of the Working Group felt that upper class Living and Learning Communities should be instituted. Skepticism for this model has been voiced by students and staff (though not by faculty). Therefore, two areas could be piloted. First, many schools have foreign language houses or international houses. Brandeis could begin with Russian and Chinese (Russian because the students at Brandeis are conspicuously devoted to the language and culture, and Chinese because student enthusiasm and numbers are high and because our resources in Chinese are especially abundant.) Second, the Humanities Fellows has been a very successful program. A living learning community of these students may work because the Fellows are already a diverse group, the students have an expectation of fellowship and community, and the cohort of 30-40 students is an appropriate size.
- Pilot having a social fund that residents can apply to in order to have parties in their residence halls. Harvard has houses in which sophomores, juniors and seniors live together. The University provides funds for social events within each residence hall. These include funds for parties.

Problem: Students of Color feel isolated on campus, and they want a safe space to call home. While we recognize the importance of residential college, we equally recognize that being a person of color on a predominantly white campus can affect a person’s academic performance, social inclusion, and psychological health.

Recommendation: Examine how different universities balance residential colleges with affinity housing, particularly affinity housing for students of color. Establish a residential house for students of color, giving students the option to draw into the space in their sophomore year.

Dining
**Problem:** At other schools, dining halls contribute to a feeling of community. At Brandeis, students do not socialize in the dining halls. Instead, the dining halls are seen as a place to eat and leave, as quickly as possible.

**Recommendation:** The Working Group unanimously recommended expanding and reconfiguring the physical space of the dining hall in order to promote community.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:
- The wall that divides students on the meal plan from those not on the meal plan in lower Usdan should be removed.
- The game room space in Usdan is underutilized, and we should rethink the space. Students have suggested that a refrigerator and microwave should be added to the game room, so students living off campus have a place to store and heat up their food. Like at the Heller cafe, students who purchase their food and students who bring their food from home should be able to eat together.
- Change the space such that there are small rooms for socializing and for studying. Make the dining halls resemble Panera, so that students can enjoy their meals in a more relaxed setting that allows for different styles and configurations of furniture.
- In both Sherman and Usdan, change the physical space such that it is a celebration of the relationship between food and culture, which also serves as an opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue and engagement. This might include information about the history of kosher, fasting as a practice across cultures, what populations don’t eat pork and why, what populations are vegetarian. Draw on the anthropology of food scholarship. Feature students who are giving advice about their dietary choices (vegan, eating more vegetables, etc.).
- In Sherman, use the stairway into the dining hall to message what to expect in the dining hall and the rules of the kosher section. Don’t expect students to know the rules about food, dishes, etc.
- Add a stage to Sherman as well as AV equipment and a sound system. Promote events happening in the dining halls as a way to further build community. These events could include faculty or alumni speakers.
- The start and end date for meal plans should be coordinated with Student Affairs in order to ensure that there is no unnecessary billing from one department to another.

**Problem:** Dining is expensive and the meal plans don’t reflect that many of the residence halls have kitchens. Students, particularly those with specific diets or food allergies, want to cook for themselves. Students repeatedly report that the labeling is incorrect. An item labeled as vegan might contain a dairy product. Students with food allergies report multiple times of mislabeling causing them to have an allergic reaction that required medical care.

**Recommendation:** Change the dining plan options.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:
- Recognize that students and their families are comparison shoppers. It is difficult to understand why one can buy better food at Whole Foods and/or local restaurants in Waltham for the same price or less than what is available on campus. For example, the
120 block plan provides 120 meals and $400 in points for $2,250. Therefore, subtracting the cost of points, the plan costs $1,850 for 120 meals or $15.41 for each meal.

- The pricing of meal plans does not always make sense. For example, the Commuter (or Graduate Student/Voluntary) Meal Plan offers 60 meals and $60 in points for $662. The 80 Block Plan offers 80 meals and $300 in points for $1,800.

- Students who live on campus should only be required to have a meal plan if they live in a facility without direct access to a kitchen within their apartment.

- Some campuses have adopted Coop programs in which teams of residents prepare meals for everyone in their hall in a rotational program. Coop programs can promote a sense of community.

- The Village should have a smaller meal plan option as the availability of kitchens is at a higher percentage than all other non-apartment facilities.

- Meal swipe equivalencies should be available in multiple forms at all outlets on campus.

- Expand Einstein’s Bagels to include a small C-store for the lower campus.

- Allow students to use their meal plans at Domenic’s in IBS.

- Give faculty and staff members a number of passes to eat at Sherman or Usdan dining hall. It is important for faculty to experience this part of the student experience, and seeing faculty in the dining hall is a way to break down barriers between students and their instructors.

- Recognize that the current pricing structure disincentives staff and faculty from eating in the dining hall. For example, lunch at Sherman costs $13.60, while the cold buffet at the Faculty Club costs 8.49 and the hot buffet costs $10.49.

- Expand the take a professor to lunch program in which students can invite a faculty member to lunch, and the University pays for the faculty member’s meal. Similarly, expand the number of vouchers available for faculty who teach large classes to take their students to coffee. Consider a parallel program for faculty who serve as academic advisors to students.

- Allow students to donate unused meals/points to students who are experiencing food shortages.

- Allow seniors to donate some portion of unused meals/points to the senior gift fund.

**Problem:** Dining is treated like a business, not an integral part of the student experience. As we talk about creating a culture of wellness or self-care, we have to recognize that food is an integral part of living a healthy lifestyle. This includes providing food at the times that student actually eat, based not only on their preferences but their practice schedules (a particular challenge for athletes). It also includes making healthy food available to students who are not able to leave campus during scheduled breaks.

**Recommendation:** Rethink how dining contributes to the overall well-being of our students.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:

- Research how other schools present dining services to their students including Bates, Bowdoin, Cornell, Rice, and Washington University in Saint Louis. All receive a score of A+ for food by Niche. Brandeis currently receives a C+.

- Address the perception and/or reality that the food on the kosher side of Sherman is better quality than the food on the non-kosher side.
• Recognize that the current dining structure is not meeting the needs of our varsity athletes. Athletes report few choices are available for them following evening practice hours. Similarly athletes with morning games on the weekend are unable to access the dining hall. Currently, parent volunteers cook breakfast for some teams during game day.
• Have more healthy choices, particularly for vegans.
• Recognize that our students come from a variety of backgrounds, both within the United States and from abroad. Our food needs to reflect that diversity on a daily basis not only for special meals.
• Be careful when organizing special meals that they don’t reflect common stereotypes in U.S. culture. For example, a meal for Black History Month that features fried chicken and greens reinforces stereotypes rather than calling them into question. Rather, think about how food can be used to bring people together. Bates has themed dining days every two weeks, and the themes include Local Food Night and Scholar Athlete Day.
• Brandeis Dining does have Pi Day. Celebrations like this are an opportunity to not only eat pie, but to celebrate an academic department in the dining hall.
• Have a “Home Recipe of the Month” competition. At Bowdoin, students can submit recipes from their families that the dining hall will make. At other schools, two student recipes might be presented in a cook-off with the intention of including the winner on the rotational menu.
• Sponsor an “Iron Chef” or “Great British Bake Off” type competition between students to bring fun into the dining halls.
• Institute a Food Feedback or Virtual Napkin Board. (This may already exist but it was not easily found on the webpage.)

While not directly related to any of the above recommendations, it is important to note that currently Department of Community Living Staff (Community Advisors, Area Coordinators, Assistant Area Coordinators) have to pay for meal plans. Among the top 50 schools (based on U.S News and World Report rankings), Brandeis is the only school that does not offer either a full meal plan or at least 50% of a meal plan for all in-house live-in staff.

**Transportation**

**Problem:** In the listening tours, both undergraduate and graduate students regularly express frustration with transportation. The shuttles don’t run on a regular schedule; the app for the shuttles don’t work; the shuttles are overcrowded so students cannot get on; there are a lack of accessible shuttles for students with disabilities; accessible shuttles don’t run on weekends. Many students also requested

**Recommendation:** The Working Group is in consensus that the University needs to rethink and expand the current shuttle and transportation program.

Current feedback speaks to issues in several key critical areas:
• Assess when our greatest transportation needs are and adjust the size of the shuttle to match that demand. We know that mid-size vans are not meeting the current demand. Larger busses are needed, the biggest issue with this request is based on our current
agreement with our insurance provider. This needs to be more fully investigated so that our student run transportation system can expand to larger vehicles.

- Expand our routes into the Waltham area that can be used to anyone trying to get to campus, not just students. This would be helpful when inviting community members to events on campus.
- Expand the current shuttle system into Boston. Consider running separate buses into Cambridge and Boston, rather than doing the current loop which is time consuming.
- Explore shared transportation options with Bentley. There may be a way to pool resources to have a Waltham shuttle that goes to each campus.
- Teach students about public transportation including how to use the commuter rail and the bus. Most students don’t know that the 70 bus goes from Cedarwood to Central Square and costs $1.70 for a one way fare.

**Neighborhood**

While these problems are outside of the purview of our working group, we heard them as consistent themes. Therefore, we are including them in our recommendations.

**Problem:** Parking is a challenge for all members of our community including students.

**Recommendation:** Build two parking garages, one in tower lot and one in the lower theater lot. While this recommendation would be one of our lowest priorities, it remains a need for the campus.

**Problem:** Gosman is small for the size of our campus, and it lacks the cardio and weight rooms that most college facilities have. Also, because it is physically separated from campus, there tends to be a clustering of student-athletes in Gosman while non student-athletes are reluctant to use the facility and/or go to games. The most direct path between Gosman and lower campus requires crossing South Street, a road which is dangerous.

**Recommendation:** Investments will need to be made in Gosman to improve the facility. A second pedestrian bridge should connect lower campus and Gosman.

**Problem:** Because of low staffing levels, internal communications is often not as strong as it should be. Therefore, faculty, staff and students often learn about events through informal channels, and it is easy to miss important happenings on campus.

**Recommendation:** The University needs to create a central way to communicate with students; it would make sense to identify a staff person in Central Communications who is responsible for student communication. A central University calendar needs to be established that includes all events. This calendar can be shared with Waltham Community members and other local Colleges/Universities. In addition, finding out about resources can be difficult. It would be helpful if there was a centralized resource wall.
Problem: The Petrie emergency fund is a critical resource for students who have economic hardships. The fund has been used for students who need glasses, dental work, testing for learning disabilities, intercession housing and food, and to replace possessions that have been destroyed by fires and floods. Each semester, the Petrie fund covers approximately $25K-$30K for these types of emergency. As of January 2019, there was only $62K remaining in the fund.

Recommendation: The University needs an endowed gift to ensure that there will always be an emergency fund for students with financial constraints.

Problem: Students have mixed experiences with University Police. Some students describe their experience as friendly and supportive while others feel judged or marginalized by officers.

Recommendation: As within other areas of higher education, there are different models for University Police. University of Delaware has been very effective at changing their culture on campus, while still being able to be effective first responders in times of crisis. Some campuses have University Police report to Student Affairs while other campuses have the model that Brandeis currently uses. Brandeis should investigate how other campuses are navigating this issue.

The Residence Life Working Group included: Jamele Adams, Daniel Breen, Hannah Brown, Steve Dowden, Kim Godsoe (co-chair), Dennis Hicks, Brian Koslowski, Elena Lewis, R Matthews, Karen Muncaster, Sara Shostak, and Tim Touchette (co-chair).

Appendix 1: Randomized Responses to the Residential College Model

Question 1: What are your overall impressions of the residential college model (favorable, ambivalent, not favorable) and why?
I am in favor of implementing residential colleges at Brandeis, as the model has proven to contribute to a positive sense of pride, identity, and belonging for members across institutional types. Successfully structured residential colleges integrate the curricular and co-curricular aspects of the university with a stronger presence of faculty, staff, and student leaders working together to offer meaningful advising, mentoring, and programming. Residential colleges transform residence halls as a place where students return at the end of a busy day to sleep (as we heard so much during our listening tours), to much more comfortable, dynamic, supportive, and exciting places to be on campus. The creation of such communities at Brandeis would give students another opportunity to “explore without boundaries” within our unique educational culture. While this is certainly an interesting idea for our university to consider, a significant amount of organization and creativity must be exercised in order to establish such communities that are ‘uniquely Brandeis.’ No matter the path forward, students must be included in the planning process. What follows are my recommendations, reflections, and questions regarding the feasibility of residential colleges at Brandeis.

In reviewing the residential college models of other institutions, there are elements that I see as beneficial to our campus community. Those elements being the creation of larger programming/community spaces. Throughout the listening tour, I heard students talk more and more about the need for community. I believe that if there was a focus on strengthening the community we could possibly add other elements that are found in other residential college models.

My impression of the residential life model is distinctly favorable, because in encouraging students to build strong communities within their residences, it also encourages them to forge closer contacts beyond racial lines and departmental boundaries, something they seem reluctant to do under current conditions. I think we have a responsibility as a university to address that reluctance, and the residential life model promises to do so in a seamless way. Also, if part of the “Framework for the Future” is to foster more meaningful engagements between students and faculty, then the experience at other campuses shows convincingly that the model is a promising way to do just this. As envisioned by the proposal, a system in which faculty would be associated with residential communities would work at Brandeis. There are enough faculty members here with wide enough interests, and genuine enough vocations for teaching and mentoring students, to make it work—and based upon the experience at other campuses, such as Rice, where faculty show commitment and enthusiasm, students will follow. I don’t think student culture at Brandeis is a barrier to the model. Whatever resistance there may be the idea seems to me to spring—as the proposal notes—from ungrounded fears about what the model actually is.
I can see the benefits of residential models; I just can’t see adopting one “off the shelf” for Brandeis. We need to look at what will work best for our students as well as our faculty and facilities.

The RC model is likely to help solve one of the major problems at Brandeis. That problem is a lack of spirit and a sense of belonging. Since I lived in a Residential College (as a resident faculty) before coming to Brandeis, I have a pretty clear idea of the upside. The benefit is that it carves up the student body into a set of manageable communities. It provides a setting in which students can meet and socialize with each other and, if it works right, they identify with the college and with the university. They carry that identity and its good memories into their alumni lives. It should help us to establish a kind of image – and the accompanying benefits – we have never enjoyed. This should include alumni generosity.

If produced, the residential college model would have to be uniquely customized to Brandeis in order for it to work; as we are a brilliant collective of individuals, not conformist, therefore our residential experience should reflect that unique beauty as well. Our individuality is a hallmark of our University. We also would need to take measures to protect and preserve the mental health of staff as well as students. When staff are stressed, that often reflects onto the student experience. We also need to embrace diversity, equity and inclusion techniques and strategies that quantify and sustain our commitment to our values, Presidential framework and evolving human landscape. We must be bold and unapologetic in our undertaking of residential college models, so as to be trend setting, for status quo is not a goal of ours. Such a model would require equitable living options, financial resources, be based on community building—not competition and thrive on our commitment to learning, connection to each other and serving as a home one values forever as OUR HOUSE-ONE HOUSE.

Overall, I am a fan of the residential college model, but I don’t feel as though a model like this would fit at Brandeis due to our student population’s tendencies to remain in community with only people like them. Please note I am not referring only to affinity groups determined by race, gender, or sexuality. I am however referring to the idea that students spend time with other students studying similar things, taking the same classes, involved in the same clubs, and so on. Where the residential college model excels is building inherent communities to begin with from the moment a student is assigned a “college”. This creates immediate community based on geographic location in terms of housing and not necessarily by interest, year, or area of study. This community in turn is secured and immutable, but level of involvement can be up to the individual. I support the model, but I wouldn’t recommend it for Brandeis. A significant shift in student population mindset would need to be made in my opinion if this is something we wanted to employ.

As discussed in several working groups the concept of residential colleges is problematic for most students to accept. The value is great, but the roll out and the marketing used needs to refer to the model in a way that makes it unique to Brandeis as any version of a residential college
would have to be substantially modified to work on our campus. Programs like “learning clusters, living and learning communities programs with these types of names will be most successful.

Overall, I have been very impressed with the Residential College model. Having attended a college in which seniors, juniors, sophomores, and first-years lived together (not in the same house for all four years) I benefitted from the mentoring of upper class students. I don’t think it is particularly healthy for all first year students to live together as you have everyone going through a very difficult transition at the same time. Even with the best CA’s there is limited guidance from peers. I would like to see there be greater connections between faculty and students; graduate students and undergraduates; faculty and staff; and alumni and students. Residential colleges provide community and a way to foster these connections.

Question 2: Are there elements of a residential college model that you think could work at Brandeis? Please give specific examples.
Well ultimately this model only works once you’ve established some kind of incentive to participate in it, willingly or not. Take Harry Potter for example. The whole point of the different houses is that they compete against each other for some kind of prize or title. The points are public and based on certain tasks and things completed. This could work but I again stray back to the students and our student culture because I don’t believe we are a competitive one (sports or academic wise). I don’t see the students having any want for that to change. I’d argue that is also what makes our school what it is. All this to say that I could see this “points” model thing working BUT it would have to be a centralized thing. We have all kinds of points systems in existence via sustainability challenge, the athletics, all of that. And the incentive must be significant.

We would need to look not at places like Yale for models but at Rice or Vanderbilt for ways of introducing the concept into our operation. I would think key elements would be threefold: 1) a more-or-less unified housing complex with 2) a senior faculty member as its head, and 3) another figure (faculty member, grad student, or dedicated staff) who serves in-house advisor for virtually all purposes (especially academic but also financial, disciplinary, and so forth). This advisor (let’s call him or her a “Dean of Students” can’t solve all the many problems that come up, but this Dean would be present in the minds of students as the go-to person-in-chief. The Dean would then liaise with the real problem solvers. This Dean should also live on the RC premises and would replace the current advisors in Academic Services. The faculty head of the college, unlike the RC’s Dean of Students, would be the face of the faculty to the RC students, so to speak --- someone they know personally, have social dealings with. He or she would live in a place close by, invite students for dinners for special events (arranged specially for the RC: music, dinners, guests, lectures, and so forth). I don’t think it is very important to have general faculty present in the college, with offices for example. The students would ignore them, and they would ignore the students.
The elements of the residential college that may work at Brandeis include affinity development based on interest/community, equity of financial programming resources, and pride grounded in “that” residential colleges connection to the larger whole: OUR HOUSE-ONE HOUSE. For example, communities with elements similar to fraternal ties, but based on Brandeis values of inclusion. This might also lead to sub-divisions of said residential college that allow for additional affinity groups connected to talent, interest, culture, nationality and/or ethnicity.

I recommend that first-year and sophomore students participate in a residential college model together at Brandeis. That way, sophomores can serve as role models for entering students. In the new Brandeis Core, the “First Year Experience” simply consists of a more substantial University Writing Seminar course – that’s it. As FYEs should be more than just a shared academic experience, I would also recommend an ‘Intro to Social Justice’ experience/course/series – integrating academic planning, community service, identity exploration, intergroup dialogue, etc. A stronger focus on psychological and physical wellness should be a major focus of a residential college model at Brandeis. In lieu of an individual first-year faculty advisor, I would like to have faculty associates (open to a more creative name) be associated with a given residence hall community – perhaps 2-3 faculty from each of the four schools (science, creative arts, humanities, social science). It may be interesting to create professional staff teams for each of the residence halls: staff from Community Living/Orientation, Advising, Hiatt, in addition to faculty associates. We would need to spend time identifying and clarifying roles and responsibilities, but it may be powerful for a consistent small group of adults on campus to be present and connected with a residence hall in one way or another. We should also better utilize local alumni to engage in conversation with current students. Given the size of our school and systems currently in place, I’m not sure if we need a ‘dean’ of the residential college – we just need to role model effective collaboration in support of these communities.

The proposal addresses the most obvious reasons for skepticism, especially the surprising shortage of common space and other facilities in existing residence halls. Building communities is certainly going to require infrastructure investment. But if these concerns can be resolved, I think such communities could thrive here. I’m especially taken with the concept of linking residence life with particular service organizations through the Waltham Group, an idea that meets one of the main points brought up by other universities we’ve contacted, that any residential college model should fit the particular culture where it’s being implemented.

I think we could implement a residential college model for the first and second year of college. Without completely redoing our housing stock, it is difficult for me to envision a four-year model working. I think we should pilot having stronger associations with the residence halls before progressing to a full faculty in residence program.

One of the elements that I love is the concept of building community/affinity to a building or area. For instance, Yale and Harvard seem to do this well. Those residents align their community
to part of their identity as a student at those institutions. Additionally, there can be a great deal of pride that could develop if something similar would be done here.

I also liked the idea that those students remain in a designated community after they complete their first year. You begin to develop stronger friendships and community because you are seeing the same people each year. (This concept would be feasible if our housing stock was more balanced and equitable. There is such a variance in our stock, this would be difficult to manage.

An idea that also came to light is a Residence Hall Cup. Each building or quad would compete against one another – giving them an even larger sense of pride for their community. The competition could pull from the strengths of the community and engage them in events that would challenge them mentally and/or physically.

- The elements that seem most appropriate/effective for Brandeis include:
- If we look at “residential college” as a way of building a community without using a blueprint someone else developed, then it is a good fit for what we hope to do.
- An “affiliated” faculty for a residence hall or grouping would be a good element. Not a live-in faculty - that would limit the pool of willing faculty. However, a faculty who could provide academic and cultural programming, advise students, and provide a link to the academy.
- Keeping students together in a hall for their first and second years would help deepen the sense of community.
- Offering programming from a variety of sources and that ties to institutional goals within the residence halls.

The concept of faculty liaisons with each community is a component of the model that could be very valuable. This will depend heavily on the strength of the commitment between the faculty and the program administrators within Community Living.

**Question 3: What are the largest barriers to a residential college model at Brandeis (current housing stock, student culture, developmental needs)?**

We need to do a better job of explaining the model to current students. We could start the professional teams’ model, mentioned above, next year. This would be a small step in the direction of housing faculty in the halls in the future years. The term “residential colleges” may feel confusing at Brandeis – I recommend incorporating the philosophy of the model, but giving the public identity a fresh name so that we can brand this new approach something ‘uniquely Brandeisian.

The barriers to the residential college working at Brandeis currently are:
1. human resources
2. financial resources
3. equitable housing
4. affordability
5. clear buy-in from faculty
6. sustained celebration of staff along with healthy risk taking for morale that lends itself to the embrace of new ideas

The main problem would surely be current housing stock. Housing would have to be reconfigured with offices and living accommodations for the RC Head (living quarters for the Head of College would have to be the symbolical embodiment of the college’s spirit, i.e. NOT Spartan, or skimpy, or merely utilitarian – a cheap solution sends the wrong message. The Dean of Student’s housing can be more modest of course, since his or her dealing with students will occur main in the college office. As for the obstacle of current student culture: We are in the process changing student culture, so I do not think present student culture is the key. Moreover, one of our problems is the lack of student culture and tradition. We are seeking to establish an identity and tradition that will last and be identifiable from the outside.

The largest barrier is the current housing stock, without a doubt. Another barrier is staffing. Even if we were to raise enough funding to manage something like this, should we put a focus on building new structures instead of strengthening/improving what is already here? This was brought up in a one of the Listening Sessions. There are challenges to the services we currently provide for students as well as some that we aren’t providing such as more community and programming spaces throughout campus. There’s also a lack of a true central Student Center that can be the hub of student activity and that can be loud, gregarious, and full of energy.

The most significant barriers to adopting a residential college is our physical infrastructure, the need for renovated and new housing, and the need for additional housing. I strongly and enthusiastically endorse the residential college model, and I recognize that implementing the model does not fix the very real problem of deferred maintenance and the physical shortcomings of our current spaces. Another barrier to implementing the model is that students are resistant to the idea. At times, this is because they don’t understand what the model would be, and at times, it is because they honestly don’t like the residential college model.

Barriers:

- Facilities. Our halls are absolutely not designed for this configuration.
- Human resources - insufficient staff and faculty
- Money - for facilities, human resources and all the other costs that will arise.
- Lack of a strong rationale of why we would do this, a set of champions who would design a program for Brandeis, and a team that would implement it. Lack of clarity on what we mean by residential college
- House systems are often predicated on competition - not sure our students would be interested and not sure it would be yet another stressor that they don’t need.

This is an area that is probably not going to work based on past programming attempts at Brandeis. Competition has caused some concerns, however affinity building doesn’t necessarily mean we need competition.
The student body. Then housing stock. Then money. Then the student body again.

**Question 4: Are there any other ideas that we have missed?**

I DO think the model could work if faculty were associated with creative programming at particular houses without necessarily being expected to live there or nearby—leaving interested graduate students to live on site—but that opinion is not strong enough to be a basis for dissent. The only thing I WOULD add is that PERHAPS there should be line or two about involving the Maker’s Lab in fostering community feeling at the houses, through (for example) innovative design competitions. They would absolutely LOVE some role in this project, and right now I think they’re a regrettably under-valued resource on campus.

While I recognize how amazing residential college models seem to work at other institutions, as a university we could take the bold step to look more closely at our current infrastructure and make improvements.

I think my biggest thing that we’re missing is the actual student voice. This may be a hot take or unpopular opinion, but we don’t have (enough) of the QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE data that suggests that this would be a good idea to recommend. This could be its own listening tour to be honest. And although we did have listening tours that implied the idea (or outright imposed the question), I don’t think we had the right language to express the idea properly.

We need institutionally-endorsed co-curricular goals from which we create learning outcomes that drive our programming. From there, we develop the facilities, programming and staffing that work best to build community for our students.

If we don’t assess and intake direct feedback from current and past CA’s and staff of DCL, we are missing an exceptional opportunity to obtain unfiltered and important information in this regard. We might also take the budget request of DCL from the past 5 years to see how they align with our needs in this regard. To the converse of this and for the sake of redundancy, we strive to continue as exceptional, personal, trend-setting and unafraid of daring toward different.

The most consistent piece of feedback across the listening tours, SkyFactor, and in person interviews with Community Living staff past and present is: Our infrastructure needs significant improvements. Students want us to take care of our campus and their basic needs for living and learning. Once we address all of the deferred maintenance issues we can begin to dream. The complete renovation of all residential spaces, including the shared spaces, is the ticket to satisfying basic needs thereby freeing students from the burden of dealing with their needs not being fully met. Once freed from this burden students will embrace new initiatives and we have a better chance of successful program implementation, including but not limited to a modified residential college model.
Finally, I think we would try (or retry) the introduction of Living Learning Communities in two categories. First, foreign language is an obvious place to begin, perhaps with Russian and Chinese (Russian because Brandeis students of Russian are strikingly devoted to the language and culture, and Chinese because student enthusiasm and numbers are high and because our resources in Chinese are especially abundant). If these two take off, we can await the clamor among students and faculty to see more such LLCs established. Second, a first-year living and learning community could be established for the Humanities Fellows program because 1) that group is already diverse (i.e. not defined by a major or special interest); 2) its students arrived primed for such an experience, having been prepared in advance for a sense of fellowship and community; and 3) at ca. 40 incoming students per year the numbers seem about right. A recent poll of current Humanities Fellows asked if they would like to be in an LLC, and half said yes. So I think it would be a good idea to establish one for incoming Humanities Fellows and see if they choose to opt in.

In our last meeting, I was paired up with another working group member who was suggesting a reworking to CA Events that I will do my best to summarize and flesh out further. The overarching idea was to have CA events serve as co-curricular events that would be documented for individual students to use as professional / personal development points in future. Events would be catered and tailored around some specific skills (soft and hard) that would be guided by a series of university-wide principles. The idea is that these events would play into developing well-rounded Brandeisians who leave this university proficient in those principles. This benefits the university by providing some sort of structured support to what kind of student we want to produce, but also benefits the student by leaving them with a documented report of what skills they’ve picked up here. The working group member refers to it as a co-curricular transcript, but colloquially, I’d refer to it in a way similar to the skills section of a LinkedIn profile.

I was inspired by the number and type of student leadership opportunities at other schools: CAs, peer academic advisors, health/wellness peer advisors, house councils, floor reps, connections with maintenance/facilities, etc. I think students at Brandeis are hungry for such leadership positions, and would contribute to a stronger sense of connection and responsibility.

I really want to emphasize the need for overarching learning goals that are reinforced by all student-serving offices. There also needs to be a unified assessment plan for those offices.
Brandeis University
Student Learning/Living Experience Task Force
Undergraduate Academic Advising Working Group

Final Recommendations

Advising plays an essential and pivotal role in the experiences of undergraduate students at Brandeis. Advising informs a student’s knowledge of offerings in academic departments; understanding of university policy; and access to information about research and experiential opportunities. It is crucial that relationships be more relational than transactional for students to establish and foster relationships that create a sense of belonging and community. As a working group, we took a student-centered holistic approach, being sensitive to students’ experiences, identities, and development, to offer advising as a teaching, mentoring, and guiding experience for students throughout their academic journey at Brandeis.

The Undergraduate Academic Advising working group used a broad approach to examine undergraduate advising—pre-major and post-major—in order to identify ways to enhance advising support for undergraduate students. We critically examined the university’s advising structures, looking specifically at faculty advising, professional staff academic advising, career advising, and peer advising. We re-envisioned undergraduate advising, seeking to expand opportunities for strategic partnerships among a wide range of campus offices, with a focus on Orientation, Academic Services, and Hiatt Career Services. We wanted to think of advising as spanning the college experience from entry through graduation and beyond. We also considered infrastructural factors including physical space, fiscal resources, and time on the student academic experience.

The Working Group did extensive research using quantitative and qualitative data to inform our recommendations. Members attended dozens of Listening Sessions with members of the Brandeis community. We also reviewed institutional data and survey data from the senior exit survey, a survey of all alumni, and from campus departments. We researched the services and programming offered at a variety of peer colleges and universities and interviewed colleagues to learn more about successful advising models at other institutions.
Our recommendations were developed from significant themes that surfaced.

**Overarching Objectives include:**
1. Restructure both first-year Faculty advising for incoming students and pre-major and post major declaration advising for all undergraduates.
2. Cultivate stronger partnerships among faculty in academic departments and student services units, particularly career services, academic services, and orientation, to increase students’ knowledge and exposure to academic information and opportunities.
3. Develop innovative academic and career initiatives for faculty, staff, and alumni to have more meaningful and direct relationships with undergraduates to enhance their experience at Brandeis and beyond.

**Priority Recommendations**

**12-18 months and modest resources**

1. Extend orientation by establishing orientation groups which meet at other points during students’ first year on campus. We recommend that career services, peer advising, and other essential advising resources be integrated into orientation activities in order to expose students to these services early in their undergraduate studies. The extended orientation will provide additional opportunities for students to develop stronger relationships with faculty members and staff members who can serve as both informal and formal advisors. During the extended orientation, new students will also connect with peer advisors, including UDRs, Roosevelt Fellows, CAs, Hiatt advisors, and Orientation Leaders. In relation to peer advising, we also recommend making payment consistent for the variety of roles and exploring opportunities for cross-training. Develop an intergenerational planning team that includes staff, faculty, and students to better implement interdepartmental orientation programming.

2. Rethink faculty involvement in pre-major/post major advising with the goal of fostering stronger connections between students and faculty. Pilot a model like that of Wellesley College in which a faculty member is assigned to each orientation group and meets with this group both during orientation and at other times during the first year. Establish liaisons between academic departments and Academic Services, Hiatt, and other campus units involved in advising. In order to develop more opportunities for discussion with students outside of the classroom, provide dining hall vouchers and encourage faculty members to eat in dining halls.

3. Develop clear and consistent communications about the roles of different types of advisors on campus. Students currently have multiple advisors and often do not know who their staff and faculty advisors are or how these advisors can help them. We recommend Academic Services and Faculty meet to clarify the distinction between faculty and staff advisors so that students will know whom to contact regarding different types of questions, both pre- and post-major declaration. In order to develop clear and consistent messaging about advising, we also recommend a greater degree of information sharing and stronger communication between faculty and advisors in Career Services and Academic Services. A centralized online platform
with information about all types of advising would also help streamline student information. (See University of Chicago’s UChicagoGRAD)

**2-4 years and moderate resources**

1. **Recognize, reward, and incentivize faculty for work in advising for both undergraduate and graduate students.** The administration and faculty should discuss how to most effectively recognize and reward advising. Possible methods to explore include the establishment of a faculty undergraduate advising award, an invitation to dinner with President for the best faculty advisors, annual raises, or other compensation for time spent advising, and recognition of commitment to advising during performance reviews, during the tenure review process, and possibly toward promotion and reappointment decisions.

2. **Expand resources for career services to allow for more specialized career advising and greater opportunities to engage with alumni.** The integration of Hiatt and GSAS career services will centralize expertise around career development, alumni services, and employer relations, while also providing undergraduate students access to a larger team with diverse skill-sets and ability to create field-focused employer relations programming through more staff positions.

3. **Lengthen the orientation period before the start of a student’s first semester to allow more time for socialization to campus and consider different ways that the orientation groups may be comprised.** Currently, orientation groups are created randomly by quad. We recommend exploring other assignments, such as groups based on themes, cohorts, pre-orientation experiences, or shared interests. As described earlier, a faculty member would be assigned to each group and these groups would continue to meet during the first semester or first year, with the goal of helping students develop strong relationships with peers, faculty, and staff advisors.

**4 years of planning and significant investment**

1. **Significant financial resources could fund increased staffing across the student services units to provide personalized advice and coordinated services through orientation, academic services, and career services.** The increased staffing would also allow staff academic advisors and specialized advisors in SSSP, MKTYP, MLK, and SAS to have more time to meet with students, and to increase their presence outside of centralized offices in spaces that students frequent (administrative office in the common areas of the residence halls). Increased staff would warrant more physical office space. Attention should be given to advising for first-generation, low-income students and students of color, and transfer students, and mid-years we well as those who are not affiliated with cohort programs, and mid-year students.

2. **Establish co-curricular interdisciplinary programs that join the academic, career, and residential aspects of the student experience into thriving, meaningful living/learning communities.** These communities would provide multi-level learning environments for students to bridge their academic interests, co-curricular activities, and social experiences on and off
campus. These communities would be intergenerational and include faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Substantial funding would allow for connection of research and experiential opportunities in academic departments together across disciplines and schools, and research institutes. The actualization of this priority would for example link faculty members from different schools and graduate students to a pre-orientation program for a themed project. Funds can be used to pay faculty, staff, and students to plan, develop, and implement programming, and fund the financial cost of having the experiences as well as materials required.

3. Establish a campus culture which emphasizes the value of advising and strong advising relationships as a key element of the student living/learning experience. As described earlier, faculty should be recognized for their advising work. In order for the recommendations outlined here to be successfully implemented, Senior Administration should advocate for the advising work of faculty, staff, and peer mentors. As part of a campus culture which emphasizes advising, students should also receive guidance on engaging with their advisors, asking questions, and developing relationships which are relational, rather than transactional.

Complete Recommendations

Faculty Advising

First-year students are currently assigned a first year faculty advisor based on their major of interest in their first semester and have one scheduled 15-minute meeting during orientation. Brandeis first-year faculty advisors come from over 46 academic majors and over 130 faculty serve as first-year advisors to undergraduate students. Faculty advisors currently provide students guidance on the academic requirements, major requirements within their department, and department opportunities for research and career advice specific to their discipline. Once a student declares a their major/s, usually in their sophomore year, they are assigned a faculty advisor from the respective departments.

Problem: While many students develop strong relationships with faculty, others do not establish a strong faculty relationship in their first year or later on in their undergraduate careers. Many alumni survey respondents spoke highly of the mentorship they’d received from faculty, particularly faculty from the department of their major. Listening Group attendees reported that they had difficulty connecting with their First Year Faculty Advisors who were outside of their academic interests.

Recommendation: Create more opportunities for faculty engagement in student academic and co-curricular life. Rethink the faculty role in Orientation and co-curricular programs in order to enhance student co-curricular experiences. A key component of this recommendation involves advocacy from those in senior administration roles; these individuals should emphasize that advising is core to what we do.
• **Recognize, reward, and incentivize faculty for work in advising for both undergraduate students, pre-major and post-major, as well as graduate students.** In order for the recommendations outlined here to be successful, Senior Administration must demonstrate the importance of advising. The administration and faculty should discuss how to most effectively recognize and reward advising. Possible methods to explore include the establishment of a faculty undergraduate advising award, an invitation to dinner with President for the best faculty advisors, annual raises, or other compensation for time spent advising, and recognition of commitment to advising during performance reviews, during the tenure review process, and possibly toward promotion and reappointment decisions.

• **Rethink faculty involvement in new student undergraduate orientation and during undergraduate students’ first year.** The Listening Groups and Alumni Survey spoke highly of advising in the major, but not during the first two years. We recommend considering a model like that of Wellesley College and Vanderbilt University (Visions), in which a faculty member is assigned to each orientation group and meets with this group both during orientation and at other times during the first year. During orientation, the faculty member would meet with the group for several events, including the New Student Book Forum. Then, during the fall and possibly the spring semesters, the faculty member would continue to meet with the group. In the Orientation section of these recommendations, we have suggested rethinking the composition of Orientation Groups and possibly grouping students based on shared interests; this group composition would provide an opportunity to then match faculty to each group based on these shared interests.

• **Continue the practice of students selecting a faculty advisor once they have declared a major, while developing clearer expectations for faculty advisors in the majors.** Require students to meet with an advisor at key points during their undergraduate careers. These meetings would take place when declaring a major and when registering for courses for the upcoming semester. While the impetus for these required meetings may be course registration, these advising meetings should include discussions with students about how to become strong advocates for themselves and how to make effective use of campus resources, including workshops, online resources, and peer and staff advisors.

• **Talk to academic departments and programs with particularly strong cultures, with the goal of learning how other departments and programs could develop a stronger sense of community for their students, faculty, and staff.** Once students have declared a major, faculty within the major play a significant role as both formal and informal advisors. African and African American Studies (AAAS) and Business were cited as examples of departments with strong departmental culture; Health: Science, Society,
and Policy (HSSP) is an example of a program with a strong sense of belonging and community.

- **Establish meaningful living/learning communities with co-curricular interdisciplinary programs that join with the faculty in academic departments to participate in/coordinate experiential learning opportunities in the residential halls.** These communities would provide multi-level learning environments for students to bridge their academic interests with the research and work of faculty, co-curricular activities on and off campus. These opportunities/programs would be intergenerational and include faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Substantial funding would allow for connection of research and experiential opportunities in academic departments together across disciplines and schools, and research institutes. The actualization of this priority would, for example, link faculty members from different schools and graduate students to a pre-orientation program for a themed project. Funds can be used to pay faculty, staff, and students to plan, develop, and implement this interdisciplinary and co-curricular programming.

- **Strengthen communication between faculty and staff advisors in Career Services and Academic Services.** Depending on the needs and staffing levels, each academic department could appoint liaisons to student services including Academic Advising, Hiatt, Study Abroad, ISSO, and others. Conversely, advising staff could be appointed to departments and attend part of or all of the departmental meetings as appropriate. Department chairs could also reach out to each of these offices to discuss staff members acting as liaisons for each academic department.

- **Develop ways for students to connect with faculty informally outside of the classroom, pre- and post-major declaration.** Consider a model in which faculty members are advisors for clubs, as a way to strengthen connections between faculty and students with similar interests. For example, the Brandeis Mountain Club could bring together students and faculty interested in hiking and the outdoors. Encourage faculty members to eat in dining halls in order to develop more opportunities for discussion with students outside of the classroom. For example, faculty might receive coupons for two lunches each month in the dining halls.

**Academic Services Staff Advising**

Professional Staff Advisors are assigned to students based on their last name the summer before they begin their first year at Brandeis. This staff advisor helps students understand university academic policy and university core requirements and create a balanced schedule, and works with them their entire academic career. Students who are in cohort programs, including SSSP, TYP, and MLK Scholars, are assigned a professional staff advisor through those programs outside of the alpha split. Specialized Advising is offered to students in Student Accessibility and Support, the Student Support Services Program, the Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program, Academic
Fellowships, and Pre-health Advising units in Academic Services.

Problem: Students currently have multiple advisors; they often do not know who their staff and faculty advisors are or how these advisors can help them. Listening Group attendees spoke of the confusion about which department to go to for different concerns and the desire for a more streamlined process. Additionally, they suggested that advisors in different campus units should have stronger ways to communicate with one another.

Recommendations: Develop clearer communication about advising assignments and expectations about how each type of advisor can work with students. One of the goals of advising should be for students to become strong advocates for themselves and learn how to make use of campus resources.

- Make it easier for faculty members to determine who a student’s staff advisor is by examining the way students are assigned professional advisors (Alpha-Split or Housing assignment etc.) and clearly communicating this information to faculty.
- Strengthen relationships between faculty and staff involved in advising by developing intentional relationships between faculty in academic departments with Hiatt and Academic Advising staff.
- Aspects of academic policy are often unclear to students. This could include knowing how to add/drop classes, declaring a major, and understanding university and major requirements. Students would benefit from having a faculty or staff member who could advise them about their academic decisions.

Problem: Academic Services advising caseloads are too large. Advisors on the academic advising team currently maintain a caseload of approximately 500 undergraduates. They, just as advisors in the Student Support Services Program, the Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program, Martin Luther King Scholars, and Student Accessibility and Support are confronted with large numbers of complex cases that require extensive coordination among various student services and academic departments. This is a barrier to student access to advisor support, because the high demand for advisors diminishes their capacity to meet student demand. Staff experience high pressure from the immense volume of work which leads to staff burn out. Hiring more staff could also provide faculty relief from advising demands of pre-majors so that faculty could focus on mentoring students and build deeper connections.

Recommendation: Expand advising staff. At other comparable universities, professional advising staff maintain smaller caseload of 250-400 students. This would allow for more availability for staff to support high need students and those experiencing academic difficulty and to form deeper relationships with the students they meet.
Problem: Students have limited access to advisors due to their high demand.
Recommendations:

- Increase academic advisors’ contact with students outside of the Office of Academic Services. One possible way to connect with students is by adapting the community advising model where advisors meet with students in centralized spaces such as the SCC, the Library, and Gosman to be more accessible. This would also accommodate students who are least likely to come into the advising office because they may be shy, intimidated and apprehensive. This would also allow advisors to see students who have not ever used advising services.

- Centralized support in Academic Services makes it a place where otherwise stigmatized services such as tutoring, accommodations, and support for low-income and first-generation students are integrated with anonymity into the Academic Services office, which lowers the barrier to access for students with underrepresented identities.

According to the current Dean of Academic Services, when the prior iteration of Academic Affairs was merged with Student Enrichment Services to create Academic Services, it started a process of bringing all staff who provide general academic advising to students (Academic Advising Team, MKTYP, MLK, and SSSP) to the same tables with equal access to information about and voice in considering changes to academic policy and advocating for students. Staff from all these areas present at meetings of the Committee on Academic Standing (COAS) and its Executive Council (EXCO), and are equally represented on the Care Team, Title IX Committee, the UCC (through one representative), and Faculty Meetings. Centralization of services promotes uniformity and consistency in advising practice and maintains important communication needed to connect students to resources campus-wide.

- Student need more advisors who offer “specialized” support and expertise. Due to high demand, students have limited access to staff with “specialized” advising expertise in Academic Fellowships and Pre-health Advising. These advising areas demand we remain competitive to our peers and maintain our high profile as a university. More staff who have specialized expertise are needed to guide students through the exploration of opportunities that are the best fit for them and help students navigate the competitive application processes.

Recommendation: Special populations of students need more specialized and individualized advising support. Attention by way of more staff should be given to considering how first-generation and low-income students, students with disabilities, students of color, athletes, international students, transfers, mid-years and those not affiliated with cohort programs are given both advising support and mentoring.
**Student Accessibility and Support/Student with Disabilities:** The Student Accessibility and Support advising unit within Academic Services is moving beyond compliance to address equity for students with disabilities. SAS is working to provide graduate and undergraduate student accommodations as well as supporting faculty in creating fully accessible academic learning experiences. This work is both time-intensive and involves substantial coordination with academic and student services departments. Institutional shifts in the student experience should take into account the needs of students with disabilities. Resources are needed to support a newly developed peer advising program for students with disabilities, further faculty professional development, and expanded staff with experience developing learning materials to support undergraduate and graduate students.

**Cohort Programs:** Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program; the TRIO Student Support Services Program, and the MLK Scholars, offer comprehensive programs that include academic, personal, financial, and career advising. Students also receive academic support through teaching, tutoring and workshops, as well as cultural enrichment activities for students to bond with one another and engage in service in the community. These programs could be bolstered by providing students with deeper connections with faculty, co-curricular activities, and collaboration with student services departments.

**Underrepresented Students:** While some students in cohort programs feel that they have support (i.e.-SSSP, Posse, MLK), some unaffiliated feel isolated and marginalized by their institution. One student in a listening tour referred to herself as a “RBA: random black admit” because she was not admitted to a cohort program. We recommend the examination of the number of underrepresented students who are currently not being supported by a cohort program and explore ways to identify their needs and connect them to resources.

**Peer Advising**

Students’ peer advisors on campus include Undergraduate Departmental Representatives (UDRs), Roosevelt Fellows, Community Advisors (CA’s), Hiatt Advisors, and SSSP Peer Mentors, Orientation Leaders (OLs) and Study Abroad Ambassadors. These peer advisors provide peer leadership, mentoring, and guidance on campus in their respective areas/departments. Students often feel more comfortable asking questions of a peer whom they feel can relate to their experience.

**Problem:** There are a variety of formal peer advisors on campus, including UDRs, Roosevelt Fellows, Community Advisors, and Orientation Leaders. While many students turn to peer advisors for guidance, many others do not or are unaware of peer advising services. For example, athletes who participated in Listening Group were unaware of or rarely turned to peer
mentors, such as UDRs and RFs. In other Listening Groups, attendees talked about having many peer advisors and not knowing whom to turn to have their questions and concerns answered.

Recommedation: Increase awareness of peer advising on campus and investigate ways to streamline peer advising.

- We recommend making payment/compensation consistent for the variety of peer assistant roles across campus. Currently, some peer advisors do not get compensated for their time spent, and others do.
- Provide leadership development training for peer advisors and cross-training for different types of peer-advisors. This training could include collaboration among UDRs, Roosevelt Fellows, Orientation Leaders and Community Advisors.
- Revitalize the role of the CA.
  - Rethink CA programming, reviewing attendance and evaluating the value of current programming. Determine how this programming can contribute to a greater sense of community, possibly by connecting students to other advisors on campus through the involvement of faculty and staff.
  - Structure the CA role to build connections across campus. For example, each CA could have another "hat" as a liaison to departments, including Hiatt, Health Center, and Academic Advising, and community engagement. Programming in the quads could be developed in collaboration with these departments.
- Better integrate peer advisors like the RF’s, UDRs and OL’s into the work of academic departments, residential halls, and student services departments so that students can have increased access to support by their peers, plan inter-departmental programming, and form stronger relationships with another.

Career Advising

The Hiatt Career Center works with students and alumni to help them develop career skills and strategies for professional success. They provide a range of career-related services, including one-on-one advising, career development workshops, access to the Handshake recruiting database, and networking events.

Problem: There is a need for improved collaboration/communication in offering students advising support in academic services and career services.

Staff have indicated that, “often centers across campus don’t talk clearly together. This provides situations when there is not strong student support because staff on the front line don’t know where to send students.” In addition, “students’ lives are more intersectional and networked--but the delivery of advising is very compartmentalized” and the “intersection of mental health and career services advising is something that needs to be explored further.”

Recommendation:

Improve information sharing between Academic Services, Hiatt Career Center and the Brandeis Counseling Center to the extent possible to support students.
• This could include integrated or shared information about if/when students visit each office, shared note systems, or increased meetings between offices. Tulane offers a good model of the levels of collaboration and integration between academic and career centers.

• Increase collaboration of Academic Services programming with Hiatt Career Center and faculty partners or departments by sharing programming calendars and exploring opportunities to support or contribute to programming across the campus. Student Support Services; Academic Fellowships; Pre-health Advising, and the academic advising team collaborates on some programing with career services and there is opportunity to bring in Alumni, strengthen existing mentoring, programs and partner with faculty in academic departments.

Problem: Students have misconceptions about what career services does and they do not get enough exposure to career advising during orientation. Students in listening sessions reported, “Hiatt is focused on developing students’ skills, not delivering them job opportunities.” The statement is accurate but illustrates student frustration about not being delivered opportunities.

Recommendation: Add a career session during orientation explaining resources and timelines, and setting expectations about what is possible. A session during orientation could improve the career-seeking culture and collaboration with Hiatt.

• A planned session during orientation would help student learn how to have their needs met through career advising. This could be used in concert with a video presenting an overview of services.

• Extending the “majors and jobs” activity piloted during January orientation. Hiatt in collaboration with orientation leaders prepared an active and experiential session for students to explore the range of majors offered, the connections between majors and careers, and the transferable skills from all majors. This activity in combination with a brief overview of services presented with academic services or faculty partners could help to better set the career culture at Brandeis.

Problem: Graduate Students in GSAS need more comprehensive access to career services. The current GSAS staff to student ratio is 1:723.

Recommendation: Move forward with Hiatt and GSAS career services integration which recommends ultimately adding 3.5 FTE, 1 graduate assistant, and 4 graduate student advisors for GSAS career services.

• Integration will allow for non-duplication of management, administrative and functional roles, alleviate the administrative and marketing workload for current GSAS staff and
centralize expertise around career development, outcomes data, marketing, alumni services, and employer relations.

- Feedback from students indicated that good advising includes support for “a variety of career pathways and proactively connects student to opportunities and resources for professional development.” With the integration of GSAS, students will have access to a larger team with diverse skill-sets and expertise for graduate students. Under the current proposal, the GSAS staff to student ratio could shift to 1:134.

**Problem:** Students seek stronger direct connections with those in their field of interest, through specialized career support and enhanced access to alumni and mentoring.

**Recommendation:**

*Specialized career support for Students:*

- Hiatt staff currently have a number of educational, professional development and site visits to meet with employers and recruiters to stay up to date on the latest hiring trends in a variety of industries.
- Enhance faculty connections to career services; depending on the needs and staffing levels, each academic department could appoint liaisons to student services including Academic Advising, Hiatt, Study Abroad, ISSO, and others. Or advisors in these areas could be assigned to different majors and minors. Enhanced connections would facilitate greater information sharing and collaborative programming.
- Future expansion of career center staff with specialty or focus in a field would expand the capacity of Hiatt to provide specialized career support. Expanding staff allows for greater horizontal and vertical integration of services and support. A number of career centers have both generalist and specialist models of staffing which is achieved with increased staffing; Wellesley is just one local example.
- Expanding funding for Hiatt’s Executive-In-Residence program would allow for more specialized career advice in a wider and rotating variety of fields.
- The GSAS and Hiatt integration will allow undergraduate students access to a larger team with diverse skill-sets and ability to create more field-focused employer relations programming through the addition of staff positions. Employers could also have greater access to students, and Hiatt can leverage their involvement to recruit undergraduate and graduate students together.
- Review the budgeting and funding of Hiatt to allow for saving funds year to year to invest in pilots and initiatives; allow the department to collect and retain funds collected from donations and event fees to support additional employers/alumni and student engagement events; and explore a per student career services fee to stay current with developing technologies, online resources, site visits to employers, and tailored career events.
• Hiatt’s operating budget minus staff salaries is more than 40% lower than the operating budgets of its peers, and over 70% of centers reported having endowment and gift funds available to them with average amounts of $260,000 and $274,000 respectively, according to 2018 LACN Benchmarking Survey. Hiatt has received the same flat operating budget without additional funding sources for 10 plus years.

Access to alumni and mentoring for students:

• Hiatt teaches students how to access existing alumni networks, brings alumni to campus for networking events, and works with departments and clubs to locate alumni for events.

• Hiatt also created and maintains a number of avenues for alumni to become involved with current students. However, there is no integrated platform for alumni involvement across campus or database of alumni who are interested in becoming involved or supporting programs in other areas of campus. Brandeis could explore existing systems, or investigate new systems to help bridge these gaps and help faculty, departments, and Hiatt connect with alumni who are interested in volunteering.

• A larger barrier to alumni involvement across campus is sustained and systematic activities in which they can participate. To overcome those barriers without additional staffing or funding for programs, Hiatt created the Wisdom Wanted program, Interview Coaching, and offers opportunities to attend existing networking events or participate in existing mentoring programs.

• Targeted mentor programs have had previous success, a pilot athlete mentoring program has gone well and Institutional Advancement is purchasing software (https://www.peoplegrove.com/) to help expand the program. Increasing campus mentoring with alumni requires additional staffing and funding to allow for coordination between Hiatt, academic departments, and alumni relations to provide training and support for mentees and mentors. See Wellesley and Stanford as examples. These are not databases of alumni; they are platforms to allow students and alumni to connect especially for mentoring.

• The existing career services platform, Handshake, is expanding its ability for students (and alumni) to connect with each other through messaging, asking questions, and writing reviews. Hiatt staff are exploring how to best connect Handshake with the existing mentoring process in Wisdom Wanted.

• Recommend Brandeis raises the visibility of both formal and informal alumni connections between undergraduates and alumni by consolidating where students, faculty and staff go to learn about alumni connections and formalizing reporting of alumni engagement to alumni relations for tracking purposes.
Problem: Enhance connections between the academic classroom experience and career preparation.

Recommendation: Explore opportunities to increase faculty involvement with career services and, likewise, to increase Hiatt involvement in courses. This could include a faculty career specialist that works with Hiatt. Examples might include asking faculty who teach key courses in a major to invite a Career Counselor to speak with students for several minutes during class, faculty discussing how skills developed during the semester might be integrated into course learning outcomes and student resumes, and integrating career topics into new faculty orientation and faculty advisor orientation.

New Student Orientation

The Brandeis Orientation program serves as the first co-curricular experience that students participate in when they arrive on campus. The program aims to welcome and assist students with their transition to life and learning at Brandeis University. The events and activities help facilitate conversations among students, staff, and faculty to begin building relationships; to acclimate new students to the norms, policies, and procedures of student life; and to facilitate and encourage conversations to enhance student growth and development.

Problem: There is not enough time during orientation for students to develop relationships with their peers, staff, and/or faculty; to learn about services and support; or to gain a clear sense picture of advising and how to advocate for themselves. Students receive limited exposure to academic life at Brandeis. The relatively short time frame for orientation also leads to students feeling overwhelmed by a packed schedule.

Recommendation: Lengthen orientation to allow more time for socialization to campus. Ivy League institutions have orientations lasting an average of 7.75 days. Our UAA partner schools host orientations that last an average of 6.7 days including Washington University of St Louis with a 9 day Orientation that divides the segments into Move In/Family Programming; Immersive Experiences; and Academic Division Orientation. Other colleges have longer orientation periods, which also provide some desired unstructured time for students between orientation events. Williams College, for example, has a week-long orientation.

- A longer orientation would allow of expansion of programs into the fall and spring with orientation groups. Focus on informing students about essential resources to enhance their academic experience early. Integrate the library into orientation to highlight services that promote an equitable educational environment. Many topics important to community building are not able to be covered during the 3 day current model. These include Brandeis history; dialogue skills; Jewish community identity; Hiatt Career Center information and career exploration; resiliency skills; academic and social policies and students rights.
Special consideration needs to be paid to Midyear and transfer student orientation:

- The current calendar does not allow students time to transition to campus, and there is no scheduled time to meet with faculty advisors. We recommend a longer orientation period for both August and January orientations; currently, the January orientation (2 days) is a day shorter than the August orientation (3 days).
- Orientation plans should also take into account the different needs and interests of these groups of students. Transfer students, for example, have already participated in orientation at another university. They may benefit from programming targeted toward students who are new to campus, but not new to college.

Move some orientation content to online modules so that more time during orientation can be dedicated to helping students acculturate to college. Online education needs to be marketed as a part of orientation similar to Emory’s Emory Essentials and Reference Pages. Some of this education will be accomplished through the new Brandeis Core curriculum, specifically the health and wellness curriculum, but discussion based programming will need to be developed and strengthened during orientation.

Evaluate staffing needs to meet the demands of a longer Orientation program that is inclusive of pre-orientation experiences, online education components, university education and social programming. Advisory and Planning committee structures should be explored to strengthen the interconnectivity of the program across the university.

Problem: There is not an air-conditioned space on campus which can house the entire first-year class, limiting orientation events for bringing all of the students together.

Recommendation: Construct a space which can hold close to 1,000 people for orientation and other community events. Install air conditioning in Gosman. One of the most popular and community building events noted in the Listening Sessions was “This is our House”. An enrolled class of close to 900 has no location on campus to experience this program together as a whole. Similarly, the university spends $30K-$50K on each tent rental because of a lack of communal space. If Gosman could be renovated and/or expanded and the need for tents eliminated, the modifications might be cost-effective.

Problem: Students from underrepresented groups may not develop a sense of belonging on campus during orientation. For example, students with limited financial means may not have
access to pre-orientation programs. While students from underrepresented groups may feel isolated in either orientation, feelings of isolation are magnified for Mid-year students from underrepresented groups, since the Mid-year group is significantly smaller and a large number of other Mid-year students, particularly those from higher-income families, have been together during a fall semester study abroad program.

**Recommendation:** Respond to student feedback about ways the Orientation experience can be made more inclusive.

- **Expand the pre-orientation model, and increase resources accordingly, so that more students can take part.** Consider inviting faculty and staff to participate to show new students how their pre-orientation topic connects to resources on campus. Students involved in the pre-orientation programs develop strong relationships with others on campus; if a larger group of students can participate, a larger portion of campus will benefit from an increased feeling of community. Options that include experiences outside of Waltham and Massachusetts and hosted by alumni and staff across the US could alleviate challenges in building infrastructure and allow for students to work longer in the summer months. University of Chicago is an example of an institution which is using this off campus, alumni involvement model in their Summer Experiences and Pre-Orientation Programs.

- **Offer a wider range of options for students interested in taking a shuttle to shop for residence hall room supplies.** For example, a shuttle currently brings students to Target, a store which is expensive for many of our students.

**Problem:** The current structure of OL groups does not foster community and relationships during orientation.

**Recommendation:** Re-think how orientation groups are structured to help students build relationships. Expand the structure to be more intergenerational by including faculty and staff roles in each Orientation group. As mentioned earlier, each orientation group at Wellesley College has a faculty member, as well as College Advisors and peer leaders (Academic Success Coaches and First Year Mentors). These groups continue to meet periodically during the first-year, providing additional opportunities for students to develop stronger relationships with their peers and a faculty member.

In addition, the university should consider different ways that the OL groups may be comprised. Currently, they are created randomly by their quad. Explore whether this could be based on themes/cohorts; pre-orientation experiences; interest, etc.
Problem: There are challenges in getting students to attend the New Student Book Forum discussions.

Recommendation: Rethink the selection of New Student Book Forum (NSBF) books. Connect NSBF with other programming that students will participate in during their first year. The first year books and Forum are only noted for the incoming classes and not public to faculty, staff or returning students. This is exclusionary in content and also is based on physical space limitations. Community members could be asked to vote on books (as narrowed by a committee) to enhance community connection to the program, similar to the Senior Speaker process for Commencement. Recognize that the most successful New Student Book Forums have used texts that are appealing to first-year students. These have included Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* and Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Academic Stress and Student Mental Health Needs

Student Mental Health Needs

Problem: Students experience a significant amount of stress, anxiety, and depression that impacts their academic engagement, course performance, and overall college experience. Student mental health challenges have a direct impact on a student’s ability to meet their academic obligations at Brandeis. With current structures in place, professional staff and faculty are often reactive to student crisis due to high numbers of students in crisis and limited staff capacity, which limits options available for students to regain ground.

- “It would be helpful if academic advising could be more involved prior to students being in crisis and going to the BCC. Sometimes students wait to ask for help until they are in an acute state when an earlier connection with a staff member would have changed things.” (Health & Wellness Listening Session participant)

Recommendation: Improve coordination of care between Academic Services, faculty in academic departments, BCC staff, and the Dean of Student Office, and Title IX, Parc, community living, International students and scholars, health center, public safety, chaplaincy, to be proactive in student support.

- Student Services staff are confronted with large numbers of complex cases that require extensive coordination among various student services and academic departments. This work demands significant time and resources for conducting faculty queries, student follow-up, parent and family conversations, and staff communication about policies,
procedures, and expectations, while also maintaining supportive relationships with all parties involved.

- A streamlined and efficient, early academic alert system for faculty to communicate with professional advising staff students who may be experiencing academic hardship in classes throughout the semester. (Workday, Maxient, Star Fish)

- A streamlined and efficient communication system between Academic Services and Dean of Students and the BCC about students of concern. This might include using a unified system to communicate events in open student cases as they happen.

Academic Stress

**Problem:** The competitive culture, the demands of heavy workloads, and the rigorous curriculum contribute to student stress. Students pressure themselves to have too many majors/minors, take too many courses, and have unbalanced course loads.

**Recommendation:** Explore ways to reduce academic stress culture on campus.

- **Increase staffing to increase staff presence in spaces frequented by students to provide more student accessibility to essential student services in spaces that they frequent.** The BCC embedded counselor model has been successful this year. A participant in the IBS Listening Session explained, "...we have worked more closely with the BCC and the embedded counseling model has really been working here. Crisis management must happen with local presence, and a base of trust."

- **Expanding all staffing levels to enhance student support:** Increase staff in the BCC and DOS to meet the increased need for student appointments/groups/services. Special attention needs to be given to increasing staff members from underrepresented groups.

- **Recognize students for their accomplishments:** Highlight the work of students who have a single major, and/or demonstrate in-depth excellence in a particular area of interest, to exemplify that students can be successful in focusing on depth, not breadth, and achieve their goals.

- **Increase resources for academic support for students to alleviate academic stress.** This could include enhancing services for academic tutoring, Brandeis University group study and other peer/graduate assistant support services, and study skills support. Look at models at other universities that have formalized tutoring centers and tutoring staff.
Academic Advisors report that we currently do not have a space big enough to support tutoring in Usdan.

- **Change the Academic Calendar:** Make changes to the academic calendar to give students more time and space to manage the demands of their academic course-loads with co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example:
  - Examine the timing of semester breaks, offering longer study periods for finals/mid-terms, and scheduling more class-free days and study days. This work might be accomplished by a future task force focusing on the Brandeis Calendar.
  - We might also examine academic policies regarding homework/assignments due during midterms and a week before the last day of classes.

**Space**

The Undergraduate Academic Experience & Residence Halls

**Problem:** Presently, academic activities related to academic disciplines/departments and advising activities happen almost exclusively outside of the residential halls

**Recommendation:** Foster both academic and social engagement opportunities in residential life communities to provide a more integrated college experience.

Listening Session attendees spoke of a need for more spaces for socialization and study in residence halls.

- Develop "lounges" or other spaces for students to meet with one another and hang out in all residential halls, especially first-year & sophomore year housing.
- Consider bringing back Living Learning Communities (LLC) for first-year students, with faculty/staff facilitating programs and groups. LLCs could facilitate regular “expert-in-residence” on a variety of topics and bring in academic advisors, BCC staff, Hiatt, etc. to their spaces for drop-in/casual conversations and programming. Increase training of staff running an LCC and the CAs about advising and campus resources.

**Problem:** Students who struggle to solidify their housing arrangements or have financial challenges meeting the financial costs associated with housing run the risk of having a rocky start to their academic experience at Brandeis due to the emotional, financial, and personal stress involved in meeting this essential need.

**Recommendation:** Residential on-campus housing should be guaranteed to from all students.

- Housing Facilities should be expanded to accommodate our growing student body
• Eliminate the fee charged to students who request to move in early before the start of the semester. Alternatively, create a mechanism for students with limited financial means to have the fee covered.

Library
The Library provides access to growing collections of print and electronic materials, including rare and unique collections. Library staff members support classroom teaching, provide in-depth assistance with research and different types of technology, and offer workshops on a variety of topics. The Library also offers a design and fabrication lab, computer labs, study space, and media production studios.

Problem: Many library spaces need to be refreshed, students often cannot find a place to sit in the building, and members of the Brandeis community are often unaware of library resources which can enhance their work. As one example of the current space limitations, one Listening Session participant described the Library as “aggressively crowded.”

Recommendations:
• Ensure that students are introduced to key library services during orientation, especially services such as course reserves and technology lending, which contribute to an equitable learning environment.
• Promote the Library as a key place where students can gain access to resources. In relation to advising, this may include advisors connecting students to academic training provided through the library, disciplinary resources and services for students’ majors, and research training which can help prepare students to work as research assistants to faculty.
• Refresh and renovate library spaces with the goal of providing more seating and enhancing spaces for group and individual work. Listening Group attendees specifically mentioned the need for natural lighting in the library and that the current state can negatively impact mental health.
• Expand library hours to accommodate students’ needs and schedules. Roosevelt Fellows specifically recommended that the library stay open later on Saturdays and open earlier on Sundays.
• Promote ways the Library can contribute to advising efforts on campus. Staff members from the Library and Academic Services already work together in a variety of ways, including sharing information and instruction related to accessibility, research instruction for students in MKTYP and SSSP, and the promotion of workshops. This work should be expanded to think more broadly about how the Library and Academic Services can collaborate. For example, a librarian who has helped a student doing innovative research might connect that student with Academic Fellowships. Or, an academic advisor might connect a student who is switching majors to the subject librarian for that
Community Gathering Spaces

Problem: Members of the Brandeis community face challenges finding space in which to gather in groups for social and academic reasons. Spaces can be costly and time-consuming to reserve. These issues can present barriers to many aspects of campus life, including advising opportunities.

Recommendation: Make campus spaces more conducive to creating opportunities for individual and group advising. Increase and enhance community spaces on campus and make these spaces easier to reserve. Refresh shared campus spaces for group and quiet student study areas. In planning for any construction or renovation, consider accessibility at the earliest stages to ensure that our community spaces are inclusive.

- Create easily accessible online systems for students/staff/faculty to reserve spaces (including academic and residence halls) on campus and to view which ones are booked and by whom.
- Reduce the costs of putting on events by purchasing and storing event equipment, such as chairs and tables, for use by members of the Brandeis community and store this equipment on campus.

Problem: The campus needs additional spaces where students can interact with faculty, staff, and other students in meaningful ways which contribute to a sense of community and belonging on campus. Dining spaces play a particularly important role in this conversation as gathering over a meal presents a way for busy students to make time for these social and advising interactions.

Recommendation: Devote funds toward developing small group spaces for casual gathering in dining halls. Panera’s “nooks” were cited as an example of this type of gathering space.
The Advising Working Group included: Kim Godsoe, Stephanie Grimes, Laura Hibbler (co-chair), Dennis Hicks, Elena Lewis (co-chair), Jim Morris, Myles Porter, Tal Richtman, Jon Schlesinger, and Elaine Wong.

Appendix D

Working Group on Graduate Advising
Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Student Learning/Living Task Force’s goal is to consider how we might develop a more holistic community for all our students—one that integrates academic and co-curricular experiences and provides students with a sense of home and belonging on campus. The Graduate Academic Advising working group offers recommendations based on common themes that emerged from the data and surveys and our listening group tours. A high priority is to develop a holistic graduate advising structure with clearly defined roles for staff and faculty across the university that is easily accessible to students. Advising should encompass academic progress and content, the general transition to graduate school and to Brandeis, wellness, crisis support, and professional development. Mental health and wellness supports are of critical importance for graduate students, who also express a need for greater social engagement. Equity and inclusion must be bedrock principles of every graduate program and central to advising structures. Our success at meeting graduate student advising needs should be assessed regularly, and sufficient resources allocated to it to be effective.

Overall, listening sessions and other data show that many of the issues we highlight stem from chronic understaffing and lack of resources across departments and offices at Brandeis. In light of the work undertaken by the Task Forces, which has engaged with many - if not all - components that make up Brandeis University, there is a strong need for the administration to demonstrate accountability and reasonably productive engagement with the findings.

Immediate goals, modest resources

- Support the proposed FY20 integration between GSAS Career Services and the Hiatt Career Center. Build some connection with career development teams at IBS and Heller. Strengthen engagement with graduate alumni, providing networking opportunities.
- Extend transitional programming beyond orientation, both university-wide and within individual programs. Support for diversity, equity and inclusion as well as mental health and wellness should be explicitly threaded throughout the extended orientation experience. Provide social events that facilitate inter-program and inter-school interaction.
- Establish a university-wide graduate program oversight group, smaller and more nimble than Graduate Council, which is a governance body for GSAS. This group should
disseminate best mentoring practices for students and faculty/staff, especially around equity, recruitment, and retention. This group should also incorporate student experiences and perspectives and ensure that best practices are employed by graduate programs across the university.

**Intermediate goals, moderate resources**

- Build an integrated graduate advising/professional development web portal as a centralized resource for programming, university resources and staff advising.
- Establish and maintain more staff at the Brandeis Counseling Center, as well as space, dedicated to graduate students. Provide more hours for embedded counselors in their areas. New staff needs to be diverse, and cultural competency training needs to be amplified to better assist students of color, international students, LGBTQIA+ students, and other underrepresented groups, especially since in certain programs minority students are studying their lived experience.
- Provide guidelines and training for best practices in mentoring. Build a mentorship network vertically among faculty, staff and peers and horizontally across the university. Provide intersession programming to facilitate inter-racial and intercultural dialogue.

**Long-term goals, significant resources**

- Build a dedicated, flexible multi-purpose graduate community space.
- Establish a separate, satellite BCC location for graduate students. Provide more extensive mental health services for graduate students.
- Establish an Assistant Dean position, dedicated to equity and climate in graduate studies.

**FULL REPORT**

**Context and Themes**

In contrast to the historical “in loco parentis” assumption of undergraduate residential education, graduate education has more often been characterized by an ethos of “sink or swim.” In some ways, this distinction is appropriate and reasonable—after all, graduate education is a journey of professionalization and deep subject and skill expertise undertaken by adults who have already navigated their way through an undergraduate degree. However, the apprenticeship model of doctoral education has always been a fraught closed circle—as #MeTooPhD has revealed, too often the primary advising relationship can be a breeding ground for harmful gender and racial power dynamics. Even aside from the quality of the primary advising relationship, graduate students across the country report extremely high levels of anxiety and depression.

For students in MA programs, much depends on whether they are enrolled in a professional or an academic program. In some professional Master's programs, there may be a more established or robust network of professionals available to students, and the program directors may tend to prioritize concrete career development and cohort experiences in line with job-market goals. In academic MA programs, particularly in departments with a sub-culture that prioritizes PhD education, MA students may feel like second-class citizens who receive very
little concrete advising support despite their enormous tuition contribution to the university. PhD students often face pressure to find tenure-track positions in academia, and those who may choose to opt out find that they are given less support and taken less seriously within their department than their peers who choose an academic career. And of course, the particular intersectional identity (gender, race, class, age, citizenship, ELL, differently abled, religious practice, etc.) of any one graduate student will interface with the program and institutional norms in ways that can produce varied experiences even in the same program.

Needless to say, the above paints an overly broad generalization. Across the three graduate schools and all of the programs at Brandeis, there are many different advising and support cultures and structures—and indeed, there are pockets of very strong graduate advising and support. However, this variance itself proves the general rule. In our internal and external research, three key themes came to the foreground:

1. Graduate advising structures should be differentiated from undergraduate structures. However, this differentiation does not mean fewer resources or support. Rather, these structures should be intentionally created with the professionalization standards of the programs within which they exist, as well as the life stage needs that are particular to a group of adults in the 23-35 age range.

2. Mental health and wellness supports are of critical importance for graduate students.

3. It is not enough for an institution or any particular graduate program to state that they must “achieve the goal of diversity”. Equity and inclusion must become bedrock principles and practices of core advising structures. The whole system needs to be redesigned and restructured with equity and inclusion in mind, even if this means a complete overhaul of departmental processes – which are often accorded the status of ‘tradition’ and therefore extremely resistant to critique - and any academic norms which are founded on inequity.

**Theme 1: Features of Graduate Advising Structures**
Advising resources need clear infrastructures and robust staffing. This structure needs to be clearly presented and advertised broadly, at the university level. Students are often confused about whom to ask for what, and both faculty and students are often unaware of resources that already exist. The roles of staff and faculty in advising should be clearly articulated. Advising resources should be centralized where possible but able to reflect program-specific needs, integrating program staff and faculty. There should be a central resource where graduate students can go to get academic support (e.g., academic writing workshops and tutorials, digital/electronic assistance, research resources and support, grant-writing workshops, time management and organization programming).

**Theme 2: Mental Health and Wellness Supports**
Graduate students frequently believe that their advisors are only concerned about their academic work, or are unaware of any support services that may help them. They worry about the stigma attached to mental health, which may prevent them from seeking help or finding out about resources available. They also perceive mental health resources as skewed toward
undergraduates. Financial concerns can also function as a barrier to receiving mental health care.

**Theme 3: Equity and Inclusion**
Each of the advising areas and approaches must be nuanced to handle the diversity of needs of graduate students, incorporating the complexity of issues international students face, along with the specific needs of graduate students of color, the LGBTQIA population, students with accessibility needs, and so forth. Many of our graduate students already have, or will begin to start, families of their own. Some are also supporting aging or ill family members. Advising and support structures must approach these situations as the indicators of the normal human development life stage that they are, rather than an obstacle to be avoided, put off or overcome.

**Analysis**
In the section below, we have categorized the key problems in graduate advising and followed them with important recommendations. All these problems overlap to some degree from category to category, as do the recommendations, but we have grouped them together in a way that best demonstrates the resources needed and the impact of the idea upon the community.

**Problem 1: Lack of consistency in graduate advising and mentoring across programs**
There is too much variation across programs, departments, and schools. Some graduate students have excellent advising experiences, while others have negative ones that range from ineffective to problematic. Advising in different areas also is inconsistent; i.e., a faculty advisor can be strong, but career advising in that area is weak/not well-informed (or vice versa).

*Recommendation: Construct an effective mentoring system with guidelines and goals, and train faculty and staff advisors accordingly.*
- Set out clear guidelines and expectations for each mentoring system, department by department if necessary, with appropriate documentation and follow-ups.
- Provide all faculty advisors with good academic mentorship training.
- Train all faculty and staff - regardless of when they joined the department - in best practices for advising and professional development in cultural sensitivity and student diversity.
- Provide training on cultural competency, effective teaching and learning practices, strategies for working with English language learners, and best practices for advising and mentoring. Training sessions should be held regularly and should be mandatory for all faculty and staff who perform these roles.

**Problem 2: Lack of standard assessment systems for departmental advising and mentoring**

*Recommendations: Benchmark advising systems and construct assessments in order to create accountability for advising. Review performance and update trainings regularly. Encourage*
inter-department/school resource sharing that leverages best advising practices of each
department/school, and creates a stronger sense of community.

- Develop internal benchmarking systems across departments where practicable. A
  number of professional MA/MS programs at Brandeis have developed robust
  professional advising systems, including MA in Teaching, MS in Genetic Counseling,
  MS/MA programs in Computer Science, and the MA programs at IBS.
- Encourage conversations about advising between programs at all levels: i.e. student,
  staff and faculty levels.
- Conduct external benchmarking systems with other universities with good advising
  systems.

Problem 3: Graduate advising is currently limited to faculty-student advising.

Recommendation: Diversify advising by constructing supportive peer mentoring systems
(horizontal) and staff-student mentoring systems (vertical) which will help reinforce faculty-
student advising while providing valuable perspective and multiple sources of support. These
support systems must be aware of and connected to other campus resources in order to provide
maximum support to graduate students.

- Set in place peer advising/mentoring systems within each department. There are many
  excellent examples of peer advising systems at the undergraduate level at Brandeis,
  such as Myra Kraft TYP, Posse, SSSP, HSSP, and Gateway.
- Hire and train graduate students as peer advising specialists of the advising support
  system.
- Assign graduate students to staff advisors who are academic, social, cultural, and crisis
  touchpoints. Similar to advising at IBS, these staff advisors are involved from admissions
  onwards, and they connect with every student. They work closely with faculty program
  directors, or Directors of Graduate Studies, but are focused on helping students
  complete their academic programs, and connecting them to resources. Peer mentors are
  integrated into this network, working closely under the supervision of these staff
  advisors.
- Make sure offices are well-staffed and that staff are not overworked as they take on
  mentoring responsibilities. Examples of robust staffing/office/structures include Cornell,
  University of Chicago, Emory, and Vanderbilt.
- Assign both faculty and staff advisors to graduate students, making clear the different
  expectations students should have for each. Make a clear division of labor in terms of
  mentorship to help all graduate students have realistic expectations of their advisors’
  responsibilities (focusing on the academic research aspect), and to facilitate the
  development of their mentoring network (for every aspect of their lives including financial
  literacy), at least university-wide.
- Construct a peer mentoring network with current students in each department.
- Construct an alumni-advising network within the department as well as across
  departments where possible.

Problem 4: Insufficient infrastructure and communication, and lack of information and
awareness of departmental advising resources as well as general resources on campus
Recommendation: Communicate advising resources consistently across the university, independent of programs. Ensure that all faculty and staff are aware of important campus resources.

- Encourage conversations about advising between programs at all levels (i.e. student, staff and faculty levels).
- Centralize staff to address advising needs common within all graduate programs. Make sure all staff and faculty are aware of on-campus resources. Integrate advising with other areas of campus resources, which need to be adequately resourced and staffed (ELP, ISSO, ODEI, Career Services, BCC and the Health Center, CTL, SAS).
- Develop a centralized platform/space such as UChicagoGRAD with the involvement of URM students, especially during the interface design stage.
- Integrate an advising support system (similar to ITS Help Desk) into the centralized platform (Demo). If such a system were in place, it should be used in parallel with in-person advising, not as a substitute.

Problem 5: Lack of Institutional Oversight and Professional Accountability over Graduate Advising

Recommendation: Create a university-wide working group, with a composition similar to that of our task force sub-group comprising staff, students and faculty, to serve as a steering committee and champion for ongoing review and improvement of graduate student advising.

- Conduct regular data analysis to learn lessons, to understand the critical issues, to prioritize the focus, and to improve/create resources for better solutions. Continuously improve the working process and documentation to ease the integration of new faculty and staff. Facilitate collaborative work and team building events for advising faculty and staff.

Problem 6: Lack of student engagement with graduate advising

Recommendation: Encourage student engagement with the advising process. Foster proactive behavior and encourage autonomy over both academic and social areas.

- Give graduate students access to event planning and management services (integrated into the centralized platform), such as 25Live, to organize their own events, including advising ones. Provide the students with the ability to (creatively) build their own profiles and (openly) share their learning and living experience on the centralized platform.
- Encourage students to use campus resources like the Writing Center, English Language Programs, the Grad Student Affairs office, the ISSO, etc.
- Create more self-services that foster student engagement (including alumni).
- Consider requiring graduate students to write individual development plans (IDPs) as part of an ongoing developmental tool for focus and reflection. (However, bear in mind that this will need training and familiarity with the process for optimum results. Some cultures perceive any writing done for a faculty member as summative instead of formative, so they may see the IDP as a performance-oriented piece of work instead of an ongoing developmental tool as they progress in their work.)
- Make sure students know what resources are available to them at all times. Encourage and promote self-advocacy on the part of graduate students but also establish strong
structural and administrative support systems that work independently of self-advocacy so that there is a culture of inclusivity and support throughout the graduate school experience at Brandeis.

The Graduate Student Advising Working Group included: Jessica Basile, Alyssa Stalsberg Canelli, Susan Lovett (co-chair), Brad Morrison (co-chair), Vinodini Murugesan, and Ajai Scott.
Appendix E

Graduate Student Life Working Group
Final Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The Student Learning/Living Task Force’s charge is to offer recommendations that will develop a thriving, holistic community for all our students, integrating academic and extra-curricular experiences and providing students with a sense of belonging. The Graduate Student Life Working Group’s mission is to better understand how graduate students define success and wellbeing and how Brandeis as an institution fosters structural, psychological and behavioral positive outcomes. Our goal is to facilitate ongoing transformation, aligning the goals of faculty, staff, and researchers with those of the students’ across schools, departments and programs. We see this as a cultural shift toward a dynamic, intellectually charged campus where difference is nurtured, exhilarating, inspired, and embraced. The data from interviews, surveys and listening sessions yielded four themes, all of which are priorities: 1) health and wellbeing; 2) communication; 3) finances; and 4) graduate students’ place within Brandeis. These themes were common, but they manifest in significantly different ways depending on the type of graduate student (e.g., the experience and needs of a Masters student in IBS are very different from those of a PhD student in GSAS). Within each theme, students report issues regarding the lack of diversity (particularly of underrepresented minorities or marginalized populations), and emphasize the importance of equity and inclusion towards improving their overall quality of life as members of the Brandeis community. Overall, listening sessions and other data show that many of the issues we highlight stem from chronic understaffing and lack of resources across departments and offices at Brandeis.

Immediate goals, modest resources
Themes 1 (Health and Wellbeing) & 2 (Communication)
• Recruit, retain and orient a pluralistic society of students, faculty, staff and researchers. Create an Orientation and transition to a multicultural graduate school programming series, supported, well communicated and promoted by students’ faculty and departments and strategically integrated with other programming and orientations both within and across each graduate school. This would have both vertical and horizontal strategies, using program faculty and staff along with other departments and offices to aid in a smoother transition into graduate school and diverse community integration throughout the first semester.

Theme 4 (Graduates Students’ Place within Brandeis)
• Programming that brings a dynamic community together. Combine academics with social experiences, such as: departmental sporting events and/or cultural outings (i.e. museums, movies, art shows, music that has a connection to field); attending Brandeis community events as a department or program; and social time during departmental talks or events where students, faculty and staff can mingle. Heller cross disciplinary “Sankofa” events or “Suds and Science” types of events would be excellent prototypes to model after. Graduate alumni can be integrated here, either through career and networking events or through social outings. Again, both vertical and horizontal strategies are at work.
• Interdisciplinary or theme based programming that purposely brings together departments across school or disciplinary boundaries. A great example of this is the MBA Stein night for students from both IBS and Heller’s MBA programs. Other suggestions include collaborative programming with the Innovation Lab, the Chaplaincy, Community Service, among others. Integration of graduate alumni into this programming could highlight identities and/or networking and mentoring opportunities.

Intermediate goals, moderate resources
Theme 1 (Health and Wellbeing):
• More (diverse) staff at the BCC, along with space specific to graduate students and more hours for the embedded counselors in their areas. Cultural competency training needs to be amplified to better assist students of color, international students, LGBTQIA+ students, along with other underrepresented groups.
• More (diverse) staff at the dean level within the Dean of Students’ office to address high volume of crises needs. Increased staff should have experience with graduate student needs, allowing Graduate Student Affairs to more adequately focus on academic and community building efforts that function as preventative rather than reactive measures.

Theme 2 (Communication):
• Implement an official internal communication system for the entire Brandeis community. This should be connected to the website, which should be interactive, easily navigated, and cater to the needs of students adequately. This would have both vertical and horizontal aspects, as it would allow for a centralization of campus-wide events, while also allowing for communication that is program-specific.

Themes 3 (Finances) & 4 (Graduate Students’ Place within Brandeis):
• Provide more job opportunities for students; particularly international students who are not allowed to work off campus.
• Subsidize commuter rail and public transportation options; expand parking availability; improve the shuttle schedules to align with class schedules; extend the hours for the Joseph’s shuttle to cover evening classes; evaluate demand and increase capacity during peak hours.

Long-term goals, significant resources
Theme 3 (Finances):
• Increase the financial resources necessary to cover the expenses associated with 21st century graduate student life: PhD stipends should be competitive with other schools in the greater Boston area, and more financial support is necessary to recruit highly qualified students at the master’s level. Larger emergency funds for each of the three graduate schools should be known to multiple staff and faculty, and maintained so that there is always enough for students in need.

Themes 1 (Health and Wellbeing), 2 (Communication) & 4 (Graduate Students’ Place within Brandeis):
• Hire and assign staff advisors who are academic, social, cultural, and crisis touchpoints. These staff advisors should be integrated into each program or division, included in faculty meetings and valued by students and faculty alike. They would work closely with faculty program directors or directors of graduate studies--but focus on helping students
complete their academic programs, integrate into the community, and connect to resources. This would help bring together vertical and horizontal strategies, as it would enable more collaboration between faculty and staff in a holistic view of support services.

Themes 1 (Health and Wellbeing), 3 (Finances) & 4 (Graduate Students’ Place within Brandeis):
• Graduate student housing that includes a graduate student center, appropriately staffed and resourced to be inclusive of graduate students with partners or children. Such housing must be priced competitively with off-campus housing in Waltham, and be comparable in terms of quality.

Themes 1 (Health and Wellbeing) & 4 (Graduate Students’ Place within Brandeis):
• It is not enough for an institution or any particular graduate program to achieve a goal of diversity. Each of the graduate schools must be nuanced to handle the diversity of needs of graduate students, incorporating the complexity of issues international students face, along with the specific needs of graduate students of color, the LGBTQIA population, students with accessibility needs, and so forth. Therefore, cultural competency is a crucial element for all of campus, but we also need to increase the staff capacity of ODEI.

FULL REPORT

The Graduate Student Life Working Group’s focus is to highlight best practices toward better work-life balance, integrating academic and extra-curricular experiences that promote belonging and inclusion in this highly pluralistic environment. The themes of health and wellbeing; communication; finances; and graduate students’ place within Brandeis are interrelated and equally necessary, and all of them include issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. It is especially pertinent to draw attention to the fact that all three graduate schools encompass a heterogeneous population of students who have disparate needs and challenges. This is both due to students’ intersectional identities, and to the unique structural and logistical underpinnings of each graduate school.

For students in MA programs, much depends on whether they are enrolled in a professional or an academic program. In some professional Master's programs, there may be a more established or robust network of professionals available to students, and the program directors may tend to prioritize concrete career development and cohort experiences in line with job-market goals. In academic MA programs, particularly in departments with a sub-culture that prioritizes PhD education, MA students may feel like second-class citizens who receive very little concrete support despite their enormous tuition contribution to the university. PhD students often face pressure to find tenure-track positions in academia, and those who may choose to opt out find that they are given less support and taken less seriously within their department than their peers who choose an academic career. And of course, the particular intersectional identity (gender, race, class, age, citizenship, ELL, differently abled, religious practice, etc.) of any one graduate student will interface with the program and institutional norms in ways that can produce varied experiences.

GSAS is an agglomeration of several programs varying from hard sciences to humanities, and is very decentralized. Hence, there is minimal community building beyond one’s individual
program, and even within programs the administrative staff and faculty are left to their own devices when it comes to being accountable for cultural competency and diverse student admissions, or catering to student needs and welfare. Moreover, GSAS also attracts a larger population of PhD students, compared with both Heller and IBS, whose career and mentorship needs are much more long-term, and contingent to their academic success. PhD students are also at a particular risk of mental health problems, attrition from programs, and isolation from other schools due to the singular track nature of their degree objectives.

Heller students have identified nine key areas that would immediately address community concerns including: food (availability at events is extremely useful if beyond pizza), a peer coaching platform (Alums/New Students), clothing drive events, improvements on student advising and mentoring, mental health services/support for students, great extracurricular activities, hiring more diverse faculty and staff, student, faculty and staff diversity trainings and job opportunities, and end of semester care events to be extended to mid semester too. The community desires a population that respects diverse opinions, backgrounds and needs. Having collected feedback from over 50% of the population through climate surveys, interviews and student advisory assessments, the community warrants action, accountability and transparency. The community warrants accessible mechanisms for connecting, and or reporting through difficult dialogues and or harassment or discrimination. In the words of one student “enough is known for action.” With all the data collected over the years, we are on the path toward building a thriving, elevated satisfaction student body increasingly likely to recommend the school and university to potential applicants.

International Business School graduate students experience struggles in all four of the main themes to varying degrees, but the fact that most classes are within one building, that the population is majority international, and the Master’s degree focus allow for the creation of a community feel. This also creates its own set of difficulties. Significant internal and external pressures can result in isolation, feelings of competition with other students and students’ feeling as though they do not have time for activities that don’t appear to further their ultimate employment goals. Repeatedly students express the difficulty of managing the competing responsibilities of academic work and career search. The pressures inherent in reaching career goals through internships and field projects as students simultaneously navigate complex visa uncertainties is an ongoing challenge. Many students are attempting to strengthen their English language skills, which can feel like yet another impossible task to accomplish during a compressed graduate degree that is typically three to four semesters long. Services of this type are hard to scale and so even if a student has the time to prioritize this goal, resources to match the varying student needs are difficult to structure. Students attempting to work together at varied English language levels can also cause friction in group work. Finally, there are many programs whose goals are to encourage intergroup interactions at the school (Leadership Fellows, BA/MA mentors, Global Gala, etc.) but students still tend to gravitate towards others of similar cultural and language. Upon speaking to students, there are many reasons for these tendencies, but a major factor appears to be simply comfort and ease, with social integration and making friends from other cultures being yet another competing priority on their already extensive list of goals.
Theme I: Health and Wellbeing

Problem: High levels of stress and anxiety
The number of people entering graduate school at both the master and doctoral levels has increased significantly over the past few decades. This coincides with rising tuition, growing income inequality, and reduced employment prospects for graduate students. The larger numbers of graduate students, their increased diversity--both in terms of the number of international graduate students and the number of domestic students who are first generation and/or from underrepresented communities--and the uncertainty of future employment directly impacts academic performance. This, alongside many simultaneous life events that, while potentially a reason for celebration (e.g. life partnerships, childbirth or adoption, independence from parents), are nonetheless stressful and add anxiety at a biologically susceptible age.

Recommendation: inclusive and welcoming integration into programs/departments
Mental health issues are one of the top concerns graduate students raise. According to the WHO 2017, depression is the most debilitating illness in the world and, emblematic of graduate students in general, over 60% of Heller students reported having one or more characteristics defining the disease (Heller climate survey). These characteristics include diminished interest, change of appetite, change in sleep, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, diminished ability to think or concentrate or recurrent thoughts of death. The stress of graduate school exacerbates any potentially preexisting mental health issues, often arising in early adulthood, or creates them anew.

Recommendations that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely

- Structural:
  - Reduce Isolation by creating vibrant shared spaces and activities within each school and program and advertise the space across programs. Students report feeling siloed within their departments or programs, where there is often little to no emphasis on wellness or self-care by faculty, and frequently not enough sense of community for students to feel comfortable or willing to turn to their peers (listening sessions from both Heller and the life sciences). When peers are trusted, they can feel overwhelmed, as they themselves often have their own struggles, and are not aware of the support systems that could help. This is especially true for students of color, for LGBTQIA students, for students with accessibility issues (Graduate students with accessibility needs spoke eloquently to their struggles on campus at the accessibility forum held January 22, 2019). The intersectionality of these identities in any individual student is particularly troubling, when race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation heighten the risk of depression in young adults. UChicagoGRAD and GRAD360 at Clemson both show the ways in which some of these issues could be addressed with clear and interactive websites.
  - A regular time where non-academic programming is provided and enthusiastically supported by faculty and staff (programming open to
all members of the community, and structured so that students feel welcome to make their own choices about what to do, but are not simply going back home or staying in labs/work spaces continuing their work). Examples include MIT’s Independent Activities Period, Yale’s Founder’s Day, or UMaine’s Maine Day.

- Don’t only advertise, but welcome graduate students from across the campus to all campus-wide events (i.e., videos on public screens; digested email that is centralized; google app with activities calendar that is centralized and all inclusive).
- Create summer programming to reduce the isolation of students who are on campus over the summer.

- Psychological:
  - Add multiculturally trained mandated and nonmandated support staff; assuring a higher ratio of counselors to students within each school. There are not enough counselors of color, LGBTQIA, and counselors who speak languages other than English at the BCC. Counselors in general need more training around cultural competency and the range of behavioral norms for all students, international and domestic.

- Behavioral:
  - Provide workshops and trainings on self-care, referral sources and reporting for faculty, staff, researchers and students at least three times throughout the year. For students this should begin within summer institutes and/or orientation and be repeated once per semester. For non-students this should be at least once in the summer and at least once during the academic year.
  - Create incentives for participation in workshops and trainings on multiculturalism and mental health, as well as on the variety of cultural norms and behaviors that can cause anxiety and depression. For faculty this could include accountability in annual reviews. For students, this could be structured into programming that can be extended into becoming culturally-competent mentors for other students, and would reflect on their resume.
  - Include training on cultural norms regarding identities that include sexual orientation, pronouns, as well as priorities identified by students (e.g., food insecurity, finances, remittances). Additionally, providing opportunities where international students can share their cultural motifs with domestic students as a means of expression in graduate schools e.g. celebrating religious holidays (Eid, for instance or cultural occasions such as the Lunar New Year, or Persian New Year) in ways that would bridge the gap between domestic and international students specifically enrolled in graduate programs.

**Problem:** Lack of inclusion in cross campus health and wellbeing related activities. The Gosman facilities are geared towards the undergraduate student population. Graduate students often do not know of club or intramural sport opportunities, and have had the experience of not being allowed to participate when they have tried to join undergraduate clubs or intramural sports, or have been denied access to the gym when they have created their own
teams. There are not enough gender-neutral bathrooms on campus, and those that exist are often out of the way or hard to find. Graduate students with accessibility needs frequently do not know where to turn for support services, and may hesitate to share their disabilities with their program or faculty members due to fear of negative consequences.

**Recommendations that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely**

- **Structural:**
  - Ensure the gym facilities are open to all students.
  - Designate multiple spaces throughout campus for relaxation and self-care; place wellness product machines throughout campus (e.g., healthy food choices, helpful self-care items). Increase number of gender-neutral bathrooms, and have maps for these placed throughout campus.
- **Psychological:**
  - Increase the number and duration of wellness resources including executive functioning and professional development coaches who can address concerns regarding accessibility, time management, and stress reduction strategies.
  - Provide mindfulness programming at each of the three on campus graduate schools.
- **Behavioral:**
  - Implement a formal mentoring program that trains advanced graduate students in mentoring first year students, incorporating a tracking and reporting system. Provide incentive and formal training to student-led initiatives that help mentor and train both graduate/undergraduate students.
  - Increase visibility of Gosman to graduate students, and make sure they are welcomed in their usage of the space.

**Problem:** both domestic and international graduate students frequently experience culture shock

This occurs when they begin graduate school, causing great stress and anxiety, and can lead to increasingly negative experiences particularly for first generation students.

**Recommendations that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely**

- **Structural:**
  - Brandeis-wide graduate student orientation that is welcoming, informative and fun highlighting the ways in which graduate school is stressful, the resources available, and geared towards creating community across the three graduate schools for students.
- **Psychological:**
  - More group therapy sessions geared towards international and first year graduate students.
- **Behavioral:**
  - Policies, practices and resources to prevent situations from becoming crises. The Care Team and Title IX committees are so immersed in the details of cases, they do not have the time to step back to consider procedural and cultural changes that could prevent
crieses. For graduate students, some of these prevention practices could include:

- Orientation and transition to graduate school program series (Princeton’s Orientation is a good example), supported and promoted by students’ faculty and departments and strategic integration with other programming and orientation both within and across each graduate school. Topics include:
  - The Brandeis classroom (graduate school academic expectations, in collaboration with departments and programs)
  - Academic resources (library resources; the Writing Center; ELP; SAS; the Rabb School)
  - Diversity, equity and inclusion (consent and healthy relationships; MCCF; managing difficult conversations; accessibility and disability, LGBTQIA; imposter syndrome)
  - Health and wellness (work/life balance; stress reduction; sleep and nutrition, in collaboration with the BCC and the Chaplaincy)
  - Housing clinic (diversity; dealing with housemate conflicts; landowner issues)
  - What to do in emergencies (resources available, both on and off campus)
  - Student leadership (opportunities to get involved; seminars on leadership values and goal setting)
  - Social/Community Engagement (helping students make connections with each other and with social justice issues, in collaboration with dept of community service)
  - Explaining U.S. culture: pronouns, gender, sexual orientation, political, race, religion, etc.
  - Post multicultural images, languages and events.
  - Include graduate students in more events typically geared towards undergraduates (hikes, bands, artists and other performers, athletics, including the athletics activities calendar. Specific examples include the Leonard Bernstein Festival of Arts, TEDX, Global Week, DEIS Impact).
  - Increase programming across the three graduate schools (career treks; social events; networking; interdisciplinary research; panel-based discussions).

**Theme II: Communication**

Brandeis has an incredible richness and diversity of resources and programming that are not well known or utilized by our graduate student community. Although a number of graduate students expressed a lack of interest in anything outside of academics at Brandeis, many are eager to reach across disciplinary and cultural boundaries to work on meaningful projects and events—both academic and social—but are prevented in doing so for three primary reasons: time, lack of knowledge, and lack of structure. Communication is a key aspect of each of these three facets. A centralized internal communication system that is comprehensive, clear, and connected to an interactive website would be a huge help in connecting students to each other, to our broader community, and to the resources they need (both UChicagoGRAD and GRAD360 at Clemson University are excellent examples).

Problem: poor internal communication systems
Graduate students are often hesitant to express their frustrations directly to academic departments. They may fear risking relationships with faculty whom they depend on for grades or letters of recommendation, networking, and career opportunities. Some students come from a culture where relationships with faculty are formal, and purely academic. However, students report that they receive so many emails they are overwhelmed by them, and prioritize the ones that come from faculty or their departments. They are therefore frequently unaware of nonfaculty University resources, such as the BCC, Chaplaincy, gym, Ombuds, and many others, or feel they cannot access these because they’re geared towards undergraduates, or are not culturally competent.

**Recommendations that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (many of the recommendations under health and wellness address communication issues)**

- **Structural:**
  - **Post multicultural images and messages** of international and domestic students of color in public and private spaces across campus. Add text that validates experiences and identities, e.g., Your voice matters; tell someone how you feel.… and list options from the least to most interventionist.
  - Ensure that faculty and academic administrators know Brandeis resources
  - Advertise events and shared spaces (including clubs and sports) in cross campus newspapers, on screens.
  - Include resources in walking tours or in other ways during orientation. Transparency about what happens after students file reports.
  - Advertise essential information on academic integrity as part of transition programming
  - Advertise essential information on international student and new graduate employment requirements as part of transition programming
  - Advertise information regarding food pantry and other free food resources
  - Centralized portal for students to access information about health, wellness, tangible resources and other matters that pertain to student wellbeing which is well-advertised, accessible, ergonomic (e.g. a centralized webpage similar to LATTE or a mobile app). The portal should allow students to accomplish relatively straightforward tasks such as schedule an appointment at BCC, find out if there are any performances happening in the semester and acquire tickets for it, or put in a request for something without having to find out the right bureaucratic channel for it.

- **Psychological:**
  - Provide durable referral cards/flyers to faculty and staff that highlight signs of mental health distress and where students can find support. Faculty/staff can hand these out or use them as reminders in the classroom.
  - Post theme-based decision trees/flyers on where students can find assistance on minor to major personal issues and/or a centralized resource wall

- **Behavioral:**
  - Peer mentors who are trained in cultural competency as well as Brandeis resources who meet regularly with incoming students and can be part of the communication network. Peer mentoring should be positions similar to teaching or research assistants, and with adequate training, the pay and status
of an actual position would significantly help with the emotional labor of this work.
- Programming on transitioning, acculturation, guidelines, regulation, etc.
- More information about faculty interests so that students’ decisions on advisors and mentors is more informed; that faculty have training on best practices for mentoring; facilitate building connections and authentic relationships with multiple faculty and staff (faculty bazaars; regular events with social elements that are departmental or school-wide).

**Theme III: Finances**
A large percentage of our graduate student population are under-resourced and struggle to survive in the greater Boston area. This is especially true for our master’s students, but can also be true for PhDs. It can be especially hard on international students, who may have been told the cost of living, but don’t really comprehend what this means until they arrive. Emergency funds for each of the three graduate schools should be known to multiple staff and faculty, and maintained so that there is always enough for students in need. Brandeis needs to increase stipends for PhD students in line with Boston-area schools, and bring each of the three graduate schools’ stipends into alignment with each other; increase merit funding available to department for MA students; return to former practices of reducing extended registration fees (e.g., for MA students who have completed all coursework and only completing the thesis).

*Recommendations that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (these are all structural):*

**Problem:** lack of on-campus jobs for graduate students

*Recommendation:* more on campus jobs, especially needed for international students, the vast majority of whom cannot work off campus.

**Problem:** transportation and parking
While the shuttle service is free, it is not suited for graduate student needs. There is very limited shuttle availability during the weekends and summer, which is especially disadvantageous to graduate students who work outside of usual university days. The reservation system often fails, as the tracker is not reliable; the shuttles are frequently late, or too infrequent, or full. Other means of transportation are also ill-suited, as the commuter rail is almost prohibitively expensive; and if you have a car, there is not enough parking on campus.

*Recommendation:* The shuttle service should be aligned with class schedules, including graduate night classes. Shuttles need to be larger and more frequent in peak periods to accommodate more students. Brandeis should further subsidize the MBTA Semester Pass program; and create more parking on campus. Parking also needs to take into account the accessibility needs of students.

**Problem:** Lack of on-campus housing, and rising costs of housing in Waltham. Off-campus housing resources are poorly communicated on the website, and though there have been initiatives to make it easier to find off-campus housing and housemates in the past (i.e.
“MyCollegeRoomie,” “Jump Off Campus”), they have not been sustainable. The current Facebook page and listserv are not very intuitive.

**Recommendation:** Brandeis subsidized graduate housing (less expensive than current on campus options for undergraduate students). More resources for finding off-campus housing on the Brandeis website and staff communications to students. Developing a streamlined system for helping incoming students fill their housing and housemate needs and find ideal matches with other incoming/advanced students across the graduate schools.

**Problem:** Food insecurity and quality and cost of food on-campus, especially with the spike in prices in certain locations on campus (e.g. Faculty Club), and limited time of availability for many of the food that is available. This problem is exacerbated with the lack of food options over the summer and winter break months

**Recommendation:** There should be higher quality of food on campus, along with more international food diversity, at prices that are more accessible to students and representative of food costs that students would otherwise pay at food supermarkets, for example. There should be a la carte options in the dining halls rather than all you can eat. Additionally, more food options should be available during “break” times. Students would also benefit from a food pantry centrally located on campus.

**Theme IV: Graduate Students' Place within Brandeis**
Graduate education at Brandeis needs a cultural shift. The fact that one third of our student population is in graduate school means that we can no longer assume “student” means undergraduate. Graduate students recognize that they are the marked category, and therefore feel invisible or like “second class citizens.” This is particularly true for graduate students of color, LGBTQIA students, international students, and can be true for white female students, especially in the sciences. Graduate students would like to feel a sense of belonging with affinity groups, where there is a foundation of trust and safety, and feel that having this would better enable them to reach out across difference to be an active and vital part of the larger community. They would like to see more faculty and staff “that look like them.”

Having a stronger sense of belonging and community engagement would help promote health and wellbeing among graduate students, whether this belonging is specific to a department or to Brandeis more generally. Key to this goal are policies, practices, and resources to prevent situations from becoming crises. Clear and easily accessible communication about our resources and programming is part of prevention measures, and support for student participation by faculty is necessary, but department and program staff are also important. In conversations with students, faculty and staff should be promoting the various options students have to take care of themselves as whole beings, and the ways in which students can become more deeply connected to our community.

While we do not know the specific reasons why Brandeis PhD students leave their programs (PhD Student Attrition 2004-2017 report), it is unlikely that attrition is solely an individual issue for a particular student. We need to examine the holistic experiences of students once they are
in their programs, as attrition is likely due to a lack of integration into graduate programs and their cultures. In other words, the retention of graduate students can be attributed to not only their individual capacity to succeed academically, but also to the support systems and inclusive communities that welcome them into their programs, as well as into the University as a whole.

The Graduate Student Life Working Group included: Rabia Anjum, Jessica Basile (co-chair), Monique Gnanaratnam, Angela Gutcheon, Laura Hibbler, Nikita Ivenchenko, Kate Goldfield, Alex Luu, Maria Madison (co-chair), Rebecca Torrey.

Appendix F

Brandeis Student Experience Task Force
Summary Report
Susan Campbell Baldrige, Consultant

This document is a summary and synthesis of ideas that emerged from the research I conducted over the last several months on behalf of Brandeis and the Student Experience Task Force. In particular, I conducted interviews with individuals from seven different institutions regarding the student experience on their campuses: Columbia University, Franklin & Marshall, University of Notre Dame, Rice University, University of Chicago, Vanderbilt University, and Washington University at St. Louis. These interviews focused largely on the undergraduate experience, residential life (in particular their residential college systems), and the sense of community at these institutions. Particular questions focused on details about advising, community engagement, community service, and other related topics. The conversations with colleagues at the University of Chicago and Columbia were the exceptions in focusing exclusively on the graduate student experience.

The purpose of this summary is to identify some of the higher-level themes that emerged from these conversations (the specifics of each interview have been shared with the Task Force) and...
other relevant resources, and to articulate some recommendations of my own, taking into account President Liebowitz’ vision and the charge laid out for the Student Experience Task Force. I start with issues related specifically to the residential college (RC) model, and discuss related themes of importance to the Task Force, incorporating graduate student involvement, community engagement, and advising.

Themes:

Residential colleges tend to have four defining features, as outlined by *The Collegiate Way*, a website and organization designed to promote the RC model on college and university campuses: “Decentralization, academic leadership, social stability, and genuine diversity are the foundations of a successful residential college system and the means to reinvigorate university life.” The broad goals of an RC system are to create a strong and supportive community among students through assignment to smaller residential units (typically 300-400 students), and to provide meaningful connections between academic and social life through faculty engagement and programming. Beyond these broad features and goals, however, there is significant variability among the schools with whom I spoke in their implementation of the RC model. In the schools I researched, that variability often reflected the particular missions or cultures of the schools in question.

The broad distinctions made in the EAB Report (“Strategic Considerations for Building a Residential College System,” 2008) among differing types of residential college models also provide a useful framework:

- **Traditional model**: All undergraduates belong to a residential college either for part or all of their undergraduate experience. Assignment to colleges (often known as “houses”) is random.
- **Class-wide model**: The university places all members of one class (most frequently freshmen) in residential colleges. At universities with this model (e.g., Vanderbilt and Cornell), upperclassmen often have the option of living in a separate residential college for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, usually by application, though most upperclassmen continue to live in “traditional” residence halls, other types of learning communities, or off campus.
- **Theme-based model**: Residential colleges are given a theme and curricular and co-curricular programming is based around that theme (e.g., Sustainability, Science and Society, Arts and Humanities). At schools with multiple residential colleges, students are assigned by their preferred theme.
- **Major-based model**: Residential colleges are linked to academic departments. Students generally take one or more courses with other members of the residential college, sometimes in classrooms within the college.

The majority of institutions with whom I connected had a traditional or a class-wide model in place and were strongly committed to this as a way of promoting a broad sense of community and providing opportunities for students to connect with others who were perhaps dissimilar to them or unlikely to be in their naturally-occurring social groups.
One important feature of an RC model with implications for the sense of community is the **degree of continuity of the student experience**. Some campuses – Notre Dame is one example – randomly assign students to particular dormitories in their first year, and students remain there for at least the three years they are required to live on campus. Others – such as Washington University at St. Louis – have shorter-term placements in a particular RC, with students required to live there for their first two years only. Vanderbilt has a separate first-year RC, after which students may apply to move into one of several 3-year RCs. Whatever the duration of the commitment, most individuals with whom I spoke felt that the longer the students’ residence in the RC, the greater benefit it had for their experience of community and for their connection to the university. In general, they reported a 3-4 year assignment to an RC promoted their institutions’ goals more successfully than would a shorter assignment.

Another defining feature of RCs – either by its presence or absence – is the **degree of academic presence and integration** built into the model. This is typically represented by faculty involvement in, and sometimes proximity to, the RC. Schools often have a faculty member living in the vicinity of the colleges who is responsible for academic and other programming within their college. These colleagues do not oversee student behavior in the dorms, nor do they typically reside in the dorms themselves. Rather, their job is to oversee programming, set the intellectual tone or emphasis of the RC, and to get to know the students who live there. Other faculty members may also have a role to play as an affiliate of some sort with a particular college, often participating or sponsoring events, lectures, or programs within the RC. These roles vary in their particular obligations and duties. At the institutions consulted, the number of faculty engaged in significant ways with the RCs was relatively small. As one colleague noted, however, it may not be realistic or even necessary that the majority of the faculty be heavily involved. Most recommended a model with differing levels of commitment available for faculty who are interested. Even those at institutions where the RC was largely social and residential (i.e., without an explicit academic component or presence) felt that RCs are most successful in building community and supporting the students’ full university experience when there is an intellectual connection through programming and a faculty role.

Although there is great variability in the nature and quality of the **physical spaces** associated with the RCs at the schools researched, it is clear that space matters and that the spaces associated with RCs help to support the goals of the model. At many institutions, the dorms and living quarters for students vary greatly in quality and attractiveness. That said, it seems that these differences needn’t get in the way of a RC system. Most reported that students who aren’t able to live in the nicest dorms express some frustration, but that the system is beneficial regardless of these differences.

The most important features of the spaces seem to be **social and informal gathering venues tied to each RC** that are welcoming and attractive. Sometimes these have been created by converting existing dorm rooms, while in other cases the spaces have been added on to existing buildings or incorporated into the design of new ones. Most institutions have also worked to incorporate academic spaces into the RCs as well, embedding classrooms and lecture halls
within the colleges. Vanderbilt, which is in the midst of implementing an ambitious campus plan tied to their RCs, has RC buildings that include not only classrooms, but short-term housing for visiting lecturers and guests. Colleagues at Vanderbilt generously provided documentation concerning various aspects of their campus plans, which articulates a useful model of thoughtful long-term planning in the promotion of an RC vision.

Dining options are another feature tied to space in RCs. Some schools have (or are working towards) fully decentralized dining embedded in each RC (e.g., Yale, Vanderbilt), whereas at other schools, dining is largely centralized. Most schools identify this as a decision tied to cost, and those schools for whom dining takes places outside the RCs did not think this undermined the benefits of the RC model.

In addition, most schools have some form of a student or campus center that plays an important role in the student experience, and in some cases, a central dining facility is located in this building. The colleague at Franklin & Marshall had especially useful observations about various student and campus centers, and offered models at particular institutions worth considering. In the best cases, these buildings seem to serve as an important community hub, often complementing the community formed around RCs. Given the interests and opportunities at Brandeis for intergenerational connection, a campus center model that is explicitly designed to invite and engage many campus constituencies would be a model worth pursuing.

Also related to intergenerational connection is the degree of graduate student involvement in RCs at the schools researched. Some schools do have opportunities for graduate students (and often their families) to live in the dormitories, often with responsibilities for oversight of students and program development in exchange for room and board. Beyond this, most schools reported that graduate students tend to be little interested in connecting with undergraduates in this way. In fact, all the schools with whom I had contact reported that graduate students are generally most focused on their academic program, and are typically at a different life stage than undergraduates, making them understandably less interested in efforts to build community on campus. (I’ll note that the UChicagoGRAD office offers an interesting and successful model for how to address the particular needs of graduate students, and would be worth exploring further.)

A number of schools use their RCs as a mechanism for facilitating community engagement and service learning. Often this is accomplished by having particular residence hall floors or entire dormitories associated with a particular community organization as a service project for the students residing there. This was described by many colleagues as a powerful way of both connecting the university and students to the local community and also of enhancing student community within the RCs. In other cases, community engagement office representatives are located within the RCs, working with students to match them with service opportunities of interest.

For the institutions I researched, formal academic advising seems to take place primarily outside the RCs, especially advising within a student’s major. When there is significant faculty
involvement in the RCs, informal academic advising may occur there. Nonetheless, it seems that the RCs sometimes provide an important place for students to be advised about the resources available to them elsewhere at the university, with faculty or graduate students serving as a knowledge base concerning the array of services and resources available to undergraduates. Some schools also have a centralized advising office which students (especially first-year students) are encouraged or required to visit regarding their academic advising needs. This is seen as a way to insure that new students are getting accurate and consistent information, and to provide these students with the ease and efficiency of “one stop shopping.” Under such a system, centralized advisors who are knowledgeable about the full curriculum and various policies and procedures can—after an initial consultation—direct students to the needed resources and offer support and advice until they declare their majors.

Recommendations:

Taking into account the Student Experience Task Force charge and President Liebowitz’ vision, I recommend and advise as follows:

- I believe that a residential college system has strong potential to address various challenges and opportunities at Brandeis. The desire for a sense of community and connection to the university is well matched to the goals realized by RCs. What’s more, the opportunity to design living spaces that support these goals is consistent with the expressed need for improved residential spaces at Brandeis.

- It is important to articulate a clear vision and a set of goals when implementing a new system. This vision should be consistent with things about Brandeis that the community values and is committed to, and should then inform the details of how this new system operates. For example, the Brandeis commitment to the life of the mind seems like an appropriate central theme; the desire to create a stronger sense of community, especially for undergraduates, would seem to be an appropriate guiding notion as well. These ideas should then shape how the system is designed, evaluated, and refined over time in specific and identifiable ways.

- Building a residential system that is consistent with—and that indeed amplifies — Brandeis’ signature commitment to intellectual life offers an opportunity for faculty to play a visible role in this system. It is important to articulate what is being asked of faculty, and the different degrees of involvement on offer. Graduate students should also have the opportunity to participate, perhaps through subsidized housing built into the RCs. Offering meaningful connections to the RCs for staff is another way to deepen the notion of community in the RCs.

- It will be important to communicate the vision clearly and widely so that the community understands the changes to take place and why they are crucial to Brandeis’ future. It will also be essential to provide opportunities for those interested to become involved in the planning in various ways, and in particular, to be sure that students are included in the process. That said, you will not need the majority of any stakeholder group to be involved to make an RC system work. Some members of the community will be only tangentially involved, at least at first. It will be vital to develop a core group of committed individuals to do the initial work who will communicate clearly and often about plans as they develop, and who will offer opportunities for others to engage in smaller but meaningful ways.
• To the degree possible, continuity in the system is important for maximizing the students’ sense of community and connection to the university. A minimum three-year residency within an RC is ideal, based on the experiences reported by colleagues interviewed. This kind of stability over time is a cornerstone of the most effective RC models, and allows upper-class students to mentor and advise newer students within their RC community. It also allows for the emergence and transmission of continuing cultures or “personalities” within RCs.

• It will be important to build this system with the undergraduate student experience at its center. It is worth noting that this should include not only Brandeis’ current students, but the students you wish to attract in the future. Vanderbilt, for example, has intentionally built out their residential colleges with an eye toward an increasing presence of international students and scholars on its campus. If Brandeis has a future-oriented enrollment strategy, that strategy should meaningfully inform the design of the system.

• While RCs offer an effective base for community, it is worth noting that most schools also have other opportunities for students to gather in spaces and organizations focused on their personal, academic, or social interests. RCs at Brandeis should be complemented by (continued or new) support for student organizations and academic centers. This may be especially valuable for students from underrepresented groups or for those who have very specialized interests and who thus may value spaces that allow them to gather in larger numbers outside of the RCs.

• The work of building out an RC system needs to be fully integrated with the long-term financial and campus planning of the university. While it was clear that some institutions have implemented systems with relatively modest incremental funding (beyond normal levels of dorm renovation allocations), some significant renovation and/or new building is desirable to accomplish the kinds of spaces that build community most effectively. This will require an ongoing commitment (financial and otherwise) by many, including the Board, the President, and the senior leadership of the university.

• That said, every school with whom I spoke acknowledged that there is variability (sometimes extreme) in the quality of housing on their campuses, both within and outside the RCs, and noted that this is an ongoing complaint from students. This should not stand in the way of designing and implementing an RC system. Most addressed this by having a plan in place for the ongoing renovation/build-out of the system, and by emphasizing the RCs as a hub for interesting programming and needed resources.

• The Task Force is considering changes to new student orientation and advising, as well as to the residential life model, and these changes should be implemented while taking the larger and longer-term vision into account. For example, if Brandeis wishes to assign first-year students to residential colleges, orientation should take place within that RC. Similarly, in a revised advising system, academic advisors for first-year students should be assigned to students within a particular RC. Placing important functions within the RCs is crucial to their success; the reason these communities matter to students is because their regular and important needs get met there. Other reforms of the student experience must be integrated into the RC plan, for the way toward the long-term vision will be paved by anticipating and facilitating it with shorter-term work.

• Critical will be the development of an intentional plan for assessing the outcomes of changes, insuring that they align closely with the articulated vision and goals. Ideally, these assessments should go beyond measuring student satisfaction with their Brandeis experience (although this is certainly relevant). Short-term and long-term changes you expect to see as a result of the changes you will make should be articulated, and their actual effects measured. Most schools reported making changes to their models over
time, and intentional and regular efforts to evaluate the student experience along the way will allow quick and nimble pivots as needed.

- While Brandeis’ system of residential colleges is being envisioned and constructed, it will be important to visit other campuses and speak directly with those responsible for the implementation and operation of these systems. In particular, I recommend in-person visits to Yale University, Rice University, and Vanderbilt University. All three of these institutions have well-articulated and successful systems, with specific variations worth considering for their applicability to Brandeis. Given that Vanderbilt is in the middle of implementing a fully-articulated RC system, they can provide the most current information about the development and implementation of an RC model.