What is Halifax College about?

And what makes us a “college”

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Overview

• Halifax take on strategic objectives for Colleges
  – “Student confidence”

• Levels of student confidence and engagement
  – Caricatures of different groups within our membership
  – So what?

• Small script
  – Limitations of this view & hard questions

• Our challenges and proposed roadmap
What are we trying to achieve

• The ultimate goal is to **help our students to succeed**
  – Academically
    • Achieve better results
  – Personally
    • Explore their identity and interests
    • Become good members of the society
    • Feel a valuable part of something bigger
  – In employment
    • Develop skills and attitudes for success
      – Including in “selling their fish” in employment market
    • Understand what they want to achieve in life and be able to set goals for themselves

• The key enabling concept for this is **confidence**

How are we trying to achieve it

• We help our students develop confidence
  – As scholars
  – As independent individuals
  – As (future) employees
  – As group/team members
...

  *To a large extent confidence is transferable across different types & life situations*

• We note that **confidence can only be developed by doing**
  – In our context this means: **student engagement**
    • Valuable side-effects are
      - Students developing specific transferable skills, establishing a personal system of ethics, seamlessly transitioning into independence
      - Vibrant college life and a sense of belonging / community
    • However, it is essential to remember what is the primary objective (student engagement and confidence)...
Challenge of diversity

• Our main goal is to **facilitate student engagement**
  – To allow our students to develop confidence

• The key challenge is that different students engage with University experience in different ways
  – Need to recognise that students have different
    • Existing level of confidence
      – Are they ready to lead or do we still need to lead them?
    • Levels of commitment
      – Are they prepared to make long-term commitment or are they looking for a “short burst” of effort?
    • Interests
      – Do they want to explore new interests?
      – Are they focussing on what is already important to them?
  – Our response is to **establish a wide range of diverse opportunities and platforms for engagement**

Caricatures (1): “the quiet ones”

**Level 1: Students in acute distress and/or with serious and specific support needs**
  – Help to navigate through professional support services, information and university procedures
  – Help students to develop self-management frameworks
  – Help students to resolve conflict / practical difficulties

**Level 2: Students who are struggling to transition into University, suffer from mild anxieties, don’t make friends at the start of their course**
  – Help students develop social networks
    • Facilitating incidental and not intimidating interactions with other students
  – Provide a refuge from pressure of “not enjoying themselves enough”
  – Small-scale competitions
Caricatures (2): “the majority”

Level 3: **Students who don’t buy into the value of a broader university experience or don’t have interest in taking leadership roles**
- Provide more structured workshops on clearly identified topics
- College-level internships and specific volunteering positions
- Catering to specific hobbies / broad interests (sports, TV)?
  
  NB: This is the most difficult level of engagement to get students out of once they get ‘stuck’ here.

Level 4: **Students who are interested in a broader university experience and/or are intrigued by leadership roles but don’t (yet) have confidence to ‘make a splash’**
- Opportunities to help for specific activities and/or in a specific role...
- …without taking the ownership of / full responsibility for the activity
  - Specific volunteering opportunities / programmes
  - Ad hoc help in college events
  - Welcoming new students (STYCs)
  - Participating in charity fundraising / Raising and Giving activities
  - Large-scale competitions

Caricatures (3): “the stars”

Level 5: **Students who have confidence to try a leadership role but aren’t ready to commit to a “community service contract” and/or don’t want to make an open-ended / persistent commitment**
- Time-limited responsibilities with high degree of ownership
  - One off student-led events
  - Organising fundraising / RAG activities
- Semi-structured leadership programmes
  - Leadership Houses...
- Managing some of the volunteering initiatives
  - Head STYCs, Conversation classes, Kids club?
  
  NB: At this level, whilst the college expects to see some output for benefit of our wider community, it is still an “added bonus”

Level 6: **Students prepared to make significant commitment and accept service responsibilities to their community**
- HCSA committee & exec
  
  NB: At this level good-quality college activities become expected & necessary output. We rely on HCSA to help the college establish & coordinate opportunities at ‘lower’ levels.
Caricatures are useful

• Essentially outline levels of engagement / confidence
  – Need to offer a range of appropriate opportunities for improving student confidence at each level
  – The objective of activities one level is to move a student to the next level
    • Engagement at the next level is the success criteria

• Most students actually start at the first level
  – Many whizz through “the quiet ones” levels in the first week
    • or even before they arrive
  – ...but some get “stuck”
    • particularly at the third (“this is just halls”) level
  – Need to build enthusiasm & momentum early and maintain it for the first term
    • Must be selective in information we push out and schedule key messages
      – Clarity and focus are more important than completeness
    • Open days, pre-arrival communications, welcome talks & freshers week, first term events and advertisement, careful scheduling

Caricatures: What do we do?

• Lets look at the caricature levels again
• For each level answering two broad questions:

  What are the key messages for students?
  (What we want them to ‘take home’ from our advertisement and their participation)

  What is the role of the College?
  (What our staff and tutors should be doing for activities at this level)

• Headline ‘messages’ only
  – Obviously this is an oversimplification...
  – ...but useful for the clarity!
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Is it all that we do?

• No!

• But...
  – most of the things that we do relate to helping students build confidence
  – by focusing on building confidence we will hit most strategic objectives set for colleges
  – this is one way of explaining why colleges are worth their cost
    • and why staff we are worth our salaries

• Although there will be other things that we need to do
  – …it is important to remember where our role is unique and what is our primary objective.

• Currently unable to spend most of our time on confidence building activities
  – … but it should be the single most significant aspect of our work
  – All staff and tutors need to strive to increase the amount of time and effort they spend on these activities

Is this a perfect model?

• Again, No!

• But...
  – It provides a useful approximation of colleges’ strategic objectives
  – It explains why we do what halls of residence don’t
  – It allows us to have a single common objective
    • Think of it as a “beacon”
      – we may need to adjust the detailed course, but this is where we are going at the end
      – We may need to deal with other operational issues (feed the crew, maintain the ship…), but we do it largely because it is necessary part of the journey to the destination.

• It is simplistic, inaccurate, incomplete and weaker on scientific basis
  – But it is something we can relate to more easily than more accurate strategic objectives
  – It is something that can be more easily translated into action / operationalised than the strategic objectives
Should we avoid duplication?

(with what others in the university – YUSU, SAS... – are doing)

• Also, no!

• Some degree of duplication is good for the University
  – Gives students more opportunities
  – Whilst some students will find central opportunities more appealing, others will find local initiatives more accessible

• A degree of competition between stakeholders is good
  – Helps the University as a whole to improve
  – Helps us learn from each-other

• But colleges have a unique role
  – Less intimidating setting
    • Less formal
    • ‘Close’ to and familiar for students
  – Experimenting with ideas on smaller scale
    • before they become sufficiently mature for central adoption
  • NB: some ideas simply cannot be scaled up or formalised for central delivery...

• But we must not just duplicate what is done elsewhere

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Example 1: Tutors events
(Quizes, games nights, arts & crafts...)

• The objective is to create opportunities for incidental interactions
  – Help quieter students to build social networks, tackle isolation and develop social confidence
    • Focussing on Levels 1 & 2 students (not exclusively)
  – Goal: give students confidence to engage more in the future

• Tricks:
  – Regular formats to reduce effort and make less intimidating
  – Avoid megalomania: larger events are more intimidating & undermine the purpose of tutor-led events
  – Make it interesting for more confident students too
    • avoid inadvertent branding as events for “special people”
    • facilitate interactions and networking between less and more confident students
Example 2: Leadership Houses

• The objective is to help ambitious and relatively confident students to take on leadership roles
  – By organising events and activities
  – Without a commitment to specific outcomes / a community service ‘contract’
  – Within a framework of themes and mentoring

• The value is in participants’ experience of
  – Working in a group
  – Researching and interpreting topics (within house’s theme)
  – Shaping and negotiating ideas
  – Taking an idea from conception to implementation
    • And, where possible, evaluation

Example 2: Leadership Houses (cont’d)

• Primary focus is on Level 5 students

• Events / activities organised for the wider college community is not an objective in its own right
  – Rather an “opportune side-effect” (if it happens)

• Tricks
  – Recruiting enthusiastic students and ensuring good balance of backgrounds within the house
  – Maintaining students enthusiasm throughout
    • Making them feel special
  – Effective mentoring
    • ‘Unsticking’, advising, helping to brainstorm and resolve practical issues...
    • … without controlling, directing or taking ownership away
Example 3: Skills programme

• Objective is to *convince students that the College is relevant* to their education and student experience
  – By offering more clear / self contained personal and skills development opportunities
    • More classroom style than leadership
  – The workshops should be individually marketable
    • Focussing on particular and clear skills
      – Students should recognise them as ‘a thing’
    • Certificated courses are particularly useful
      – First Aid, MHFA, food hygiene?, IT ‘driving license’? ...
      – *NB: This is not the same as YorkAward certification*

• Focus is on **Level 3** students
  – *NB: The hardest level to get students out of!*

Example 3: Skills programme (con’d)

• Tricks:
  – Workshops should be suitable as both one-off and programme
  – Timing should be carefully thought through to coincide with periods when students will recognise that they need a skill
    • Not the same as when they will need it...
  – Advance planning and advertisement are essential
  – Maintain regular times and formats
    • Marketing from the start of the year: “This is what all good students do”
  – In future: need to build internal capacity for delivery of some of the sessions
    • Feed into tutor recruitment and staff development
  – Use some of the workshops to recruit students into higher-level initiatives
  – Make sure that some of the workshops are useful for Leadership Houses, HCSA committee, etc
    • Building-up base / minimal audience
So, why do we need college themes?

• Yes, what we do is primarily about “confidence”
  – “We help students build self-confidence” works as a marketing message for
    our academic colleagues and students’ parents (to an extent), but...
  – …it does not work as an effective marketing for the students themselves
  – It also doesn’t help us to focus our efforts and resources

• Themes allow us to focus our efforts and resources better
  – Organising activities that appear to be more coherent as a whole
    • Even superficial relationship will yield marketing synergy
  – Recruiting appropriate college tutors

• Themes allow us to market the college to potential students
  – Helping to ensure that students are enthused about the College before they
    arrive
  – Helping us to recruit some students who are more likely to have interest in the
    kinds of activities that we are running
    • The idea is to create a “positive feedback”
      – interested students ➔ stronger activities within themes ➔ more interested students ➔ ...

Our challenges (1)

• We are doing reasonably well on extreme levels of engagement
  – Significant improvement in recent years focused here

• Our “offer” for the middle levels is too poor
  – Most recently a bit too much focus on “the quiet ones”
  – Very few things suitable for “the majority”

• Need to be more unapologetic about what we are and what we do
  – “If you are only looking at accommodation – you are doing it wrong!”
  – Being involved is as important as the degree
    • Need to enthuse students about being involved in the college
  – From open days to pre-arrival comms to freshers week
    • Targeting both students/applicants and their parents
Our challenges (2)

• Clearing students
  – Arrive with anxieties, disappointment and lack of enthusiasm and understanding
  – Need to target this groups specifically in pre-arrival activities

• STEM students
  – Must create initiatives that appeal to this population
  – Our current activities are (slightly) biased towards social sciences and humanities

• Taught postgrads (masters)
  – Intensive programmes of studies leave little time
    • Together with cultural differences lead to less “buy in”
  – Need new and creative ideas here!
    • Currently we only offer activities at very low levels of engagement & confidence

• ‘Upper year’ UGs

Roadmap: Short/Medium Term

• New initiatives covering all levels of confidence
  – Focus on middle levels (3-5)
  – Reflecting in recruitment & training of tutors
  – Rebalancing all college roles

• … while addressing key challenges
  – STEM students, upper year UGs, PGs, Clearing students

• Addressing the ‘enablers’
  – Improving our ‘marketing’
    • Clear messages & identity
    • Open/visit days → pre-arrival → arrival → in-session
  – Facilities & processes
    • Making things easy & fast
    • Better planning
Roadmap: Long/Medium Term

• Revisiting high-end initiatives
  – Student-run quasi-businesses / volunteering schemes

• Moving towards service learning principles
  – Especially for higher-level activities