

**External Review of Division of the Dean of Students
Swarthmore College
April 23, 2018**

External Reviewers:

Dr. Victor Arcelus, Dean of Students, Connecticut College

Dr. Eric Estes, Vice President for Campus Life, Brown University

Dr. Miriam Feldblum, Founding Executive Director, Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and former Vice President/ Dean of Students and Professor of Politics, Pomona College.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the College's Charge given to the visiting team at the start of our work. We were asked to consider questions related to: 1) shifting student demographics at Swarthmore; 2) staffing structure including concerns about staff retention; 3) structure of the work including key processes and protocols; 4) and review inter-division collaborative working relationships. Within each of these four focus areas, we offer general context and observations, including noteworthy changes that have strengthened the work of the division, and recommendations for moving forward. We hope that this will enable leadership and the community to move forward based on existing accomplishments as well as identify opportunities to improve collaboration and support for students.

Based upon our visit and meetings over two and half days with over one hundred staff, faculty, and students as well as a review of numerous reports, we identified four high level observations and four main recommendations.

Observations

- **Division Development:** Over the past eight years, Dean Liz Braun and her division, have implemented necessary upgrades to offices, developed effective student support programs, and created new positions and processes that have addressed changing student needs, contributed to greater student success as part of Swarthmore's core educational mission, and ensured more accountability of staff and students in life outside the classroom.
- **Role Confusion:** Swarthmore faculty and staff care deeply about students, and many expressed significant concerns about the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities in some offices in the dean of students' division, especially the structure of the class deans. Many experience confusion with regard to communication and expressed concerns about follow through, which has been exacerbated by staff turnover, especially in areas related to diversity and equity, and by staff growth across different offices.
- **Student Engagement and Expectations:** Swarthmore students are deeply committed to the College, can articulate how they have benefited from new programs, processes, and spaces that

have been established in recent years, even as they seek ongoing change, greater follow-through, and transparency, especially in areas related to equity and inclusion generally and Title IX specifically, as well as staff responsibilities.

- **Committed Leadership:** The College's senior leadership is open to change and committed to ensuring a consistent and effective alignment of the dean of students division with Swarthmore's core academic mission, and its vision for supporting equity and student success on campus.

Recommendations

- **Staff Structure:** The visiting team recommends a structural reorganization of part of the dean of students division in order to build cohesive, collaborative, and high functioning teams across the entire division. We believe a new structure will enable the division to develop strong staff teams with focused mission and purpose that collaborate within the department group to execute on the roles and responsibilities of the group while developing strategies to partner across the division and institution to prevent isolated silos. The recommendations can facilitate the broader campus community's understanding of the division and enable people to more easily access assistance and support.
- **Staff Development:** In making the staffing changes, we encourage the College to consider the use of professional coaching and leadership training to enhance staff communication and support cohesion within the division. The college should also consider how to leverage division structure to create opportunities for professional growth that can contribute to retention of staff. It also should advance capacity building for staff related to the diversity and inclusion goals of the institution and division. It is important that everyone is capable of doing the work of supporting an increasingly diverse student community.
- **Communication:** It is pivotal that communication improve within the dean of students division units, among the units, and across the institution. The division must have a clearly articulated mission and purpose that is reflected in the day-to-day work of the staff and reinforced daily through responsive engagement that is in alignment with College values and goals. The role of the division and its importance to the mission of the College must be articulated at all levels of the organization.
- **Consistency and Follow-Through:** It is critical that the division develop long term partnerships with faculty and trust with students through consistent follow-through and execution of processes and procedures. Current structural issues are impediments that contribute to confusion and lead to breaks in important feedback loops within the broader campus organization.