# Cultivating a Culture of Care
## QEP Proposal

**Abstract**

A culture of care is already one of the hallmarks of a *Southwestern Experience*, one of our strengths, and an expectation from a growing number of prospective students, current students, and parents. An increasingly thoughtful culture of care has been developing over the years. Let's build on this momentum by expanding its range and making it comprehensive, fully institutionalized, and permanent by giving it an official structure, protocols, and objectives. A culture of care means that we provide everything that is necessary to ensure students' academic *and* personal welfare. A culture of care calls for the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated system through which faculty and staff will look after our students on an individual basis by officially providing for their diverse needs. In order to be proactive in providing support, all members of our community must be knowledgeable about signs of distress and have an easy system for providing resources or references for those in distress. We also propose additional faculty development around using this new system and implementing a culture of care into their classrooms, as well as centralizing and increasing resources related to cultivating a culture of care.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

- Students will engage in campus resources available to them in times of need.
- Students will learn how to manage challenges to foster a greater understanding of well-being.
- Students will develop a sense of belonging within the classroom and the larger SU community.
- Students will broaden their perspective of self-care and consideration of others.

**Project Description**

**Introduction**

Throughout their four years at SU, students experience a wide range of difficulties, both academic and personal, that challenge their ability to succeed and to thrive. Yet, SU is a small, tight-knit community. Faculty and staff know students individually. Unlike at big institutions, students are not anonymous or "lost in the crowd". A culture of care harnesses this proximity and turns it into a formidable asset for the benefit of our students. This proposal calls for the creation of an expanded, comprehensive culture of care system that will centralize the full spectrum of student needs and will offer students, faculty and staff the appropriate tools to address these needs effectively. Making care and compassion an institutional priority will heighten student success and put it at the core of SU's mission. Such a commitment to individual attention and personalized care will set us apart from other Higher Education institutions and will be an incentive for prospective students to invest in an SU education.

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**Historical Context**

Not only are faculty and staff already engaged in a culture of care through existing mechanisms such as the Academic Warning System (AWS), but they also support students more informally, outside of existing structures, in a variety of ways, in their times of academic distress; through physical illness; mental health challenges or other situations. We have additional resources and programs which help support students in distress.

The original Early Warning System began in fall 2002. It was targeted toward first-year and new transfer students only until fall 2006. Until fall 2015, the system was only open for the first 5 weeks of the semester. The current AWS is accessible beginning the 3rd week of classes and allows faculty to identify students who demonstrate signs of academic distress in order to connect these students to resources on campus. In spring 2018, the OAR provided oversight for the AWS. The office compiles and analyzes data to provide to faculty and staff.

In 2017, Southwestern University hired a Director of Advising and Retention. The Office of Advising and Retention (OAR) works collaboratively across campus to evaluate current and implement new retention programs/strategies. We encourage students to complete an exit interview when they decide to leave the university before completing a degree. Over the last year, the top reasons for leaving our university have included "wanting to be closer to friends and family" and "personal problems". These findings support the need to institutionalize a culture of care where students feel that SU is a home away from home.

The Student Issues group began meeting in the spring of 2003. The group changed the name to the Student Success Team and then to the Care Team. The Care Team meets weekly to discuss how to support students who have been identified as experiencing challenges in and/or out of the classroom. The goal of the team is to promote the academic success, safety, and health of students which, in turn, aids in the well-being of the Southwestern community. Over time the group started tracking AWS and we added GPA and roommate information to the spreadsheet. Currently, the Care Team includes the Vice President for Student Life, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Students, Director of Counseling and Health Center, Director of Center of Academic Success, and Director of Advising and Retention.

The Center for Academic Success (CAS) assists students through several programs and services including academic advising, services for students with disabilities, academic coaching and peer mentoring. CAS hires Peer Academic Mentors (upperclass students) who are assigned to incoming students to provide academic support through individual appointments and workshops centered around study skills, test-taking strategies, and time management.

The Counseling Center provides confidential, short-term individual, group, and couples counseling concerning personal issues. Recently, the center introduced a new series of psycho-educational workshops.

In November of 2017, an emergency fund was approved and made available to our students. Students can obtain emergency help for unexpected expenses, including: food, housing, medical care, technology, travel, and other unexpected or unforeseen needs. Students who receive funding are not required to repay the funds. The maximum amount that may be awarded to students is $500 during a calendar year. A student may receive emergency funds up to two times during their SU career.

**Southwestern University**
This QEP speaks to Southwestern's mission and values. Creating a culture of care will certainly produce students that "cultivate[ing] those qualities and skills which make for personal and professional effectiveness." A campus wide culture of care will also reinforce our value of "respecting the worth and dignity of persons."

Initiating a culture of care will speak most directly to Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan by providing the campus community (as well as parents and alumni) a common language focused on providing a student-centered experience. A culture of care would speak directly to building and sustaining a diverse, inclusive community grounded in mutual trust and respect that promotes shared commitments, accomplishments, accountability, and responsibility for achieving institutional goals. In

addition, a culture of care would encourage students, faculty, and staff to support, lift up, and engage with one another, with our alumni and friends, and with Southwestern as an institution.

A culture of care also has the potential to increase students' sense of belonging. Belonging has a direct impact on student persistence and retention. This directly relates to Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan.  In particular, this sense of belonging would likely increase our first- to second-year retention rate and increase our 6-year and 4-year graduation rates.

Through the proposed project, students will also have the opportunity to engage with campus resources and programs that will have a positive impact on well-being. This directly relates to Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan. In particular, our proposed project would help redefine the residential experience and offer students co-curricular programs that improve their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

**Initiatives**
**a. Pirates Helping Pirates: An integrated, centralized system for reporting any student concern**
We propose the creation of a comprehensive system that would integrate existing mechanisms and informal interventions and that will be an expansion of the current Academic Warning System. The Pirates Helping Pirates system will allow for multiple touch points, including a support network for students. This warning system will not be tied to course rosters which would allow for faculty, staff, and students to report on any student in distress. The system will support students who are struggling in classes, as well as experiencing particularly challenging situations, such as mental or physical illness or the passing of a loved one. New procedures will be developed to include what is done more informally in order to encompass a wider variety of student needs. Such an overall system will provide heightened individual attention to each SU student. Appropriate outreach will be directed to the student.

Our current AWS is only accessible for faculty based on their class roster. There is no automated system in place that allows advisors, staff, or students to inform appropriate staff when a student is in distress. Also, the AWS does not allow us to track the steps the student may have taken after receiving the alert. We are unable to know if the student utilized the resources recommended to them or reached out to their professor for more assistance. At present, we are only able to determine if the student dropped the course and what their final grade is at the end of the semester, as well as their semester GPA. However, we don't know what factors influenced those outcomes.

**b. Faculty development**

A comprehensive Culture of Care system will require significant, mandatory training of faculty and staff. They not only need to learn about the new system, its procedures and protocols, but it is also essential that they understand the rationale for an expanded culture of care along with its benefits. Faculty and staff concerns and questions must be addressed to ensure strong buy-in, as some of our colleagues subscribe to the principle of guiding students to be resilient and ready for "the real world."

All SU Syllabi will include a standard Culture of Care paragraph that will build on the existing syllabus paragraph on student accommodations.

**c.  Increasing Resources**
In creating a Culture of Care, many of our current resources will need to be improved, centralized, and better communication about these resources will need to be initiated.

1. Create a centralized tutoring program with a referral system and follow-up. This centralized tutoring area should also include expanded tutoring offerings in the areas of study skills, English grammar and syntax, life skills, and more. The centralized tutoring program will have a Tutoring Coordinator that is a faculty member who has two course releases per year to assist with creating and maintaining this centralized resource.
2. Institutionalize the work done by student organizations related to the Culture of Care. This includes creating a permanent home for the SU Treasure Chest (an exchange store on campus) and working with the Food Justice Association to add a Food Pantry to this space. It is also recommended that this space also be a location where students can seek funds from the SU Emergency Fund. Recommendations for students to seek help from the food pantry, SU Emergency Fund, or SU Treasure Store would be integrated into the centralized system mentioned above. A Coordinator of Care position would be created to oversee these initiatives.
3. Create a Culture of Care learning series that provides at least ten student activities related to the Culture of Care each academic year. These could include health and wellness activities, mental health awareness, inclusion and diversity activities, bystander training, study skill sessions, etc.
4. Create shared materials that highlight the components of Southwestern's Culture of Care. These materials will include information sheets about the resources related to Culture of Care and where to find those resources. They will be shared with the entire SU community (faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni) so that all of us will be able to direct students to the correct resources.

**Assessment**

The following measures will be useful in assessing the Culture of Care: retention (first- to second-year and first- to third-year) rates, number of faculty development sessions, number of student activities related to Culture of Care, number of students who attend student activities and engage in student services, and various numbers from the Pirates Helping Pirates system (numbers of faculty and staff actively engaging with the system, number of referrals through the system by categories, etc.). In addition, assessment tools such as faculty and staff surveys over training sessions, and surveys about user-friendliness of the Pirates Helping Pirates system will be developed and administered. Assessment will be conducted by the Culture of Care Committee at the end of each spring semester.

**Project Resources/Participants**

Creating a Culture of Care is a community wide effort. Several offices will play a large role in this QEP.

The Coordinator of Care will lead the Culture of Care QEP. This position will work closely with the student groups who run the Treasure Chest and the Food Justice Association to create a more centralized location for students in need of food/clothing resources. The Coordinator of Care will also work closely with the Tutoring Coordinator and the various offices involved in the Culture of Care initiatives.

We recommend the creation of a Culture of Care Committee that will consist of the new Coordinator of Care (who will chair the committee), Jennifer Leach, a representative from Center for Academic Success, a representative from the Counseling and Health Center, Shelley Story, one faculty representative, and one student representative. This committee will oversee the implementation of the QEP; remain together after the QEP process is complete to ensure the Culture of Care is continued; assist with faculty and staff development, and deal with questions, issues, suggestions, new ideas, needed improvements to the Pirates Helping Pirates system. This committee will work closely with the Care Team to offer outreach to students who are in distress.

The Office of Advising and Retention and Center For Academic Success will work together on finding and creating the Pirates Helping Pirates System and will also provide workshops for faculty, staff, and students on how to use the new

Pirates Helping Pirates system. These offices will work closely with ITS and Administrative Computing to ensure any selected system will be able to synchronize with our student database. Also, ITS and Administrative Computing may offer technical support throughout the process of transitioning to the new system. Center For Academic Success will also work with Academic Departments and the Debby Ellis Writing Center on ways to create a centralized tutoring system. Likely, we will need to assign a faculty member to serve as a Tutoring Coordinator to supervise student tutors, offer training, develop evaluations, and organize tutoring schedules.

The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship will offer various professional development opportunities to assist faculty and advisors in creating a Culture of Care.

Mosaic, Residential Life and the Counseling and Health Center will work together to create programming for students related to creating a Culture of Care.

Marketing and Communication will create materials to market programs offered through the Culture of Care initiative, as well as create email and website communication to share with the SU community including prospective students and parents.

**Timeline**
Fall 2021-Spring 2022 - Formation of Culture of Care committee to help review potential software systems, hold demos of systems, invite vendors to campus
Spring 2022 - Select Faculty Tutoring Coordinator (gives time for development in tutoring best practices)
Spring 2022 - Begin hiring procedures for Director of Care position
By June 2022 - Selection of software system to house Pirates Helping Pirates
*In June 2022 WebAdvisor which currently houses the AWS will no longer be available.*
Fall 2022 - Major professional development sessions on Pirates Helping Pirates system and guidelines
Fall 2023 - The Coordinator of Care is announced
Fall 2023 - Launch of centralized tutoring system with expanded offerings
Spring 2024 - Launch of centralized Care initiatives (Food Pantry, Treasure Chest, and Emergency Fund)
Beginning May 2023  - Annual assessment of Pirates Helping Pirates system, tutoring services, student programming, and use of Care programs
Fall 2023 -  Launch continued student programming related to the Culture of Care
Fall 2023 - Spring 2028 - Continued professional development around Pirates Helping Pirates system, software updates and edits are made by the vendor
Fall 2027 - Spring 2028 - Work on SACSCOC Impact Report
September 2028 - Submit SACSCOC Impact Report