



February 15, 2021

To: Dr. Carl Mattacola, Dean, School of Health and Human Sciences
Dr. Kathleen Williams, Senior Associate Dean, School of Health and Human Sciences

From: William H. Johnson Jr, Student Success Coordinator, School of Health and Human Sciences

RE: (New) Office of Transitions and Transformation

Good day, Dean Mattacola and Senior Associate Dean Williams.

I will start with a request: please take a minute to complete the following sentence: “We want our HHS students to....”

After you complete the sentence, ask yourself the question, “Are we doing it?”

I grapple with these concerns every day, asking myself, “What do our students really, really want from their college experience?” For me, it’s a continuous dance between institutional needs (increased retention and graduation rates; increased donations from alumni; and increased research money for faculty), student needs (clarity and direction for the future; work that makes a difference and makes money; and meaningful connections), and parents/family needs (for their children to have a secure financial future and better life). Ultimately, students and parents need the University to provide the tools and experiences for their children to create a better life than they (the parents) had. We are being asked to transform the lives of our UNCG students.

However, there seems to be a disconnect at UNCG between the needs of students/parents, the definition of student transformation, and how we actually transform their lives. That is most evident by how the institution defines and measures student transformation. As stated in UNCG’s Strategic Plan:

“Student transformation occurs when students acquire knowledge and develop skills and habits of mind necessary to be life-long learners, informed and engaged members of society, and successful in life and work. (Core Elements, <https://strategicplan.uncg.edu/core-elements/>)

To measure the effectiveness of student transformation, the University has focused their efforts on increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Goals and Initiatives: University Level Goals, <https://strategicplan.uncg.edu/goals-and-initiatives/>). There is no mention in the Strategic Plan that measures the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills and habits of minds to be lifelong learners, to be informed and engaged members of society, and their level of success in life and work. If student transformation is an important piece of the Strategic Plan, we need clear, measurable practices in place to help students transform their lives.

I would argue that the School of Health and Human Sciences, and specifically the Life Design Catalyst Program, has made inroads in addressing student transformation. The Life Design Catalyst Program was created to complete the sentence, “We want our HHS students to....” and to answer the question, “What do our students really, really want from their college experience?” As the School of HHS undergoes significant changes to address student success, I believe the Life Design Catalyst Program can be instrumental in bridging the gap between student transformation and institutional needs. We have shown that this process has worked in the past – and I believe it will have an even greater impact on higher education in the future.

Proposal: I am proposing the creation of the Office of Transitions and Transformation, turning the Office of Advising and Personal Development into two separate units, each with a distinct and valuable function within the School of Health and Human Sciences. The Office of Transitions and Transformation will not only continue to provide transformational experiences for our first-year students, but for all students within the School of HHS. This document shares the rationale for such an Office.

The Life Design Catalyst (LDC) Program’s primary role is to help students move from where they are right now (current state) to where they want to be (desired state), as shown in the graphic below:



The LDC Program provides the tools and resources to help reduce “The Gap”; the Gap is the “stuff” that keeps students from becoming more effective learners and more likely to achieve their potential. It’s important to know that The Gap is different for every student, so the process of addressing The Gap will be different. Reducing The Gap is about transformation, but instead of focusing on student transformation, one alternative is to focus on “Identity Transformation,” addressing questions such as:

- What experiences will be most effective in helping our students transform?
- How do they see themselves?
- How do we help students develop a more realistic, compassionate self-concept?
- How can we best contribute to students' transformational journey?

Identity transformation is the process of changing who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world, and the characteristics that define you – for the better. Identity transformation fills The Gap between who you are now and who you want to be in the future. From our experience, we believe that most students want to learn how to change and grow to be their best selves. They desire more confidence, to be more self-accepting, to know that they belong and that they matter. Students want to transform their lives to become better versions of themselves. Our role in this process is to assist them in their transformation journey, helping them to resolve their internal and external struggles, then inspire them with an aspirational identity that changes their lives. The student is the hero of the story and we are the guides to help them on their journey, and to witness and celebrate their successes.

The Life Design Catalyst Program, since 2014, has focused on addressing The Gap, with an emphasis on the exploration of purpose and meaning. In a study by Gallup and Bates College, purpose and meaning were found to be essential in developing graduates engaged in successful, purposeful work (Forging Pathways to Purposeful Work: The Role of Higher Education – <https://www.gallup.com/education/248222/gallup-bates-purposeful-work-2019.aspx>). We impart student transformation through our two 1-credit, first-year Design Your Life courses, HHS125: What Could I Do With My Life and HHS135: Redesign a Life You’ll Love. The HHS125 course at its core addresses three “Simple Rules for Success” – (1) Know Yourself, (2) Serve Profoundly, and (3) Find Your Right Pond. We believe the content in this course (listed below) provides the foundation to move towards success in both life and work. The HHS135 course addresses the habits of the mind, not only to be lifelong learners, but to instill practices that ensure well-being – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The combination of these courses has not only resulted in student transformation but has also led to increases in retention and graduation rates.

Components of the Life Design Catalyst Program has been adopted by several units across campus. The HHS125 course is recommended as part of the 4-Year Graduation Plans for students in Communication Sciences and Disorders, Kinesiology, Public Health Education, and for all students pursuing Pre-Health Sciences. We have also found that parts of the Life Design Catalyst curriculum are currently used in both the FYE101: Succeed at the G and BUS115: Blueprint for Personal Development courses at UNCG. This work has not only impacted students in the School of HHS, but also the across other disciplines as well.

One of a prominent characteristics of Life Design Catalyst work is that it’s consistently changing and improving, based on the feedback from students. In the 2021 Spring Semester, we have modified the curriculum for both the HHS125 and HHS135 courses, as they are both being taught online asynchronously. As you note the variety of topics covered in each of the classes, you’ll understand why there is such demand for this work at UNCG, as well as institutions across the country.

HHS125: What Could I Do With My Life (1 credit)	HHS135: Redesign a Life You’ll Love (1 credit)
<p><u>Life Work Activities</u> Personal Responsibility Personal Integrity Personality Assessments Strengths Assessments Values Assessments Personal Motivators/Personal Superpowers Seven-Word Life Motto Meaningful Work Statement Calling Connection Plan Core Emotional Challenges/Pressing Societal Issues Problem-to-Solve One-Liner Engagement in Life's Work I Am Because You Were Statement Dream Team/Dream Community Vision for Work Statement</p> <p><u>Poster Projects</u> You, The Superhero Life's Work Poster</p>	<p><u>Life Work Activities</u> Self-Care Practice I Am Story My Life Story Happiness and Success Mindset and Self-Talk Empowering One-Liner I Am Poem Transformation Triad Self-Assessment What Holds You Back: Fear and Limiting Beliefs Extraordinary Life Self-Assessment Your Eulogy Personal Manifesto Desired Feelings Vision for My Life Life Word</p> <p><u>Poster Projects</u> Current State vs Ideal State Ten-Year Vision Board</p>

It is my hope that this proposal can initiate conversations regarding student success within the School of HHS. Although student success has been a topic of interest both within the School of HHS and across campus, I believe a deeper conversation should be initiated connecting student transformation and student success, especially with the staff of the Office of Advising and Personal Development, who are involved in both processes on a day-to-day basis. Both advising and personal development are required for students to be success in the School of HHS; both entities should be viewed as complementary services to ensure students leave with both a plan to graduate and a plan for life during and after college. One thing to note - as technology rapidly changes, the role of the traditional advisor will change, especially in the processes of registration, scheduling, and degree evaluation. Many institutions have systems that automate and synchronize registration, scheduling, and degree planning/degree evaluation. It’s only a matter of time before these systems are in place at UNCG. What our informal research has shown, substantiated by articles and papers submitted through organizations such as the National Academic Advising Association, most students are unsure what they want to do as a major and/or career and want help with those decision, as well as how to implement strategies to create a life on their terms.

Implementation: We currently have the staff to begin the process of establishing an Office of Transitions and Transformation in the School of HHHS (Megan Cayton and myself). As we continue to provide support for the

students in the School through our classes, we would need to hire a part-time person (20 hours per week) to not only facilitate a few sections of our HHS125 and HHS135 classes, but also help with the management of the various functions of the Office. Those functions may include activities such as: follow-up calls with potential clients, donors, and/or funding agencies; assistance with budget reconciliation; and assistance with marketing and promotion. The two full-time Catalysts would continue to teach the majority of the HHS125 and HHS135 courses, as well as several other Design Your Life upper-level courses (ENT/HHS250: Purpose-Driven Entrepreneurship and ENT/HHS275: Entrepreneurial Personal Branding). In addition, they would provide Trainings and Workshops on- and off-campus, maintain a budget for the Office, reach out to potential clients, assist with potential alumni donations, and pursue grant opportunities – just to name a few.

Unlike most student success units across campus, we have been able to generate our own income to supplement the Life Design Catalyst Program. As we continue to expand the work within the School, we'll continue to expand the work across campus and beyond. I am confident that we'll be able to generate funding to not only provide ample support for the students in the School, but also cover the salary of this part-time person. In the near future, we would like to offer both paid and unpaid opportunities (independent studies, practicums, internships, apprenticeships, etc.) for both undergraduate and graduate students to work with us in the Office. I believe potential donors and grant sponsors would be interested in supporting the Office and our work. Imagine the appeal to a potential donor to support a new Office that is empowering young people to gain clarity and direction in career and in life through the exploration, evolution, and expression of purpose and meaning.

You'll find additional information to support the Life Design Catalyst Program and the creation of an Office of Transitions and Transformation, under the section, "Food for Thought." We've included a brief snapshot of the data (including enrollment, retention and graduation rate numbers, and specific student transformation outcomes, a brief list of on-campus departments and off-campus institutions that have attended one of our Trainings, have hosted a workshop and/or training on their campus, and/or implemented some aspect of Life Design Catalyst work). We have also listed outside recognition of the Life Design Catalyst Program outside UNCG. I will also attach the results 2020 Fall Semester HHS125 Course Evaluation, which will provide student feedback on their experience from the class clearly linked to student transformation.

We offer a life-changing experience. We offer results, a transformation, and a long-term relationship. We offer a clearer path and a better future. I will leave you with one final question: "How can we help students make the most of their educational experience by understanding and getting what they really, really want – and how can we convey to them that we are the solution?"

Thank you for your time; I look forward to future conversations.

Sincerely,

William H Johnson Jr.

Food for Thought...

I. Snapshot of Data on Life Design Catalyst Program

HHS125: Design Your Life I - What Could I Do With My Life course

- Enrolled over **2,500** students in course since Fall 2008
- Over **230%** enrollment growth over past three years (243 students enrolled in 2015-16, 388 in 2016-17, 443 in 2017-18, and 567 in 2018-19).
- Projected to enroll up to **600 students in 28 sections** of HHS125 just in the 2019 Fall Semester (25 in-person and 2 online sections).
- From Fall 2008 to Fall 2013, achieved slightly higher Retention Rates (**3.2%**), as well as higher 5-Year (**6.4%**) and 6-year (**2.8%**) Graduations Rates than the UNCG average.

- Since Fall Semester 2014 (when we implemented the Poster/Presentation Projects), achieved over **81%** Retention Rate for all students, over **40%** 4-Year Graduation Rate, and over **63%** 5-year Graduation Rate - a 5-Year Graduation Rate that's significantly higher than the 5-year AND 6-year Graduation Rates averages for all UNCG students.
- Achieved over **82%** Retention Rate for all Minority students, including:
 - Achieved over **84%** Retention Rate for Black/African American students.
 - Achieved over **83%** Retention Rate for Hispanic/Latino students.
- Achieved over **91%** Retention Rate for Transfer Students (Fall Semester 2018 to Fall Semester 2019).

First-Year Experience: Combination of HHS125 and HHS135 in First-Year of College

- Students who've taken HHS125 in Fall Semester and HHS135 in subsequent Spring Semester of their first year in college:
 - Achieved over **88%** Retention Rate.
 - Achieved over **69%** 5-Year Graduation Rate.

Student Feedback on HHS125 course (328 responses - Fall 2017; 399 responses - Fall 2018) - Percentages based on responses to "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to statements. First percentage refers to results from Fall 2017 evaluation; second percentage refers to results from Fall 2018 evaluation.

- **86.0%** and **91.5%** - This course helped me understand my meaningful work - how I plan to serve others.
- **86.9%** and **81.9%** - This course helped to clarify my goals and dreams and create a vision for my future.
- **87.8%** and **89.5%** - This course provided me with knowledge that could help me be successful in life.
- **82.0%** and **84.4%** - I believe that I can make better decisions about my life and my future now that I have completed this course.
- **80.0%** and **84.9%** - I have a much better understanding of who I want to be and what I'm here to do now that I've completed this course.
- **90.8%** and **95.7%** - I would recommend this course to other students.

II. Life Design Catalyst Work On- and Off-Campus

- At UNCG: Over 30 different departments/units at UNCG, over 80 different colleges and universities across the world, and over 20 professional organizations and local/community industries.
- North Carolina System institutions include Appalachian State University, North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, University of North Carolina-Wilmington, and Western Carolina University.
- Institutions outside North Carolina include Arizona State University, College of William and Mary (VA), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Michigan State University, Texas A&M University, University of Arizona, University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Maryland-College Park, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Louisville (KY), University of Oklahoma, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Implementation at units across Departments/Units at UNCG:

- ACE (Academic Recovery) Program – provided strategies to help probation/suspended students get clear about options and develop plan for future.
- Beyond Academics - students enroll in our four HHS/Design Your Life courses every semester for past four years.
- Campus Recreation - provided personal development workshops for student staff.
- Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders – provided graduate school application seminars for 2nd degree students.
- Department of Counseling and Educational Development - worked with Hispanic children providing strategies for college/life success. Currently offers graduate level course, HED688: Coaching and Life Design in Student Affairs.
- Elliott University Center – provided personal development workshops for student and professional staff.

- Healthy UNCG (Staff) Program – provided personal development workshops for UNCG faculty/staff.
- Living Learning Communities – created Design Your Life Living Learning Community for first-year students.
- Office of Intercultural Engagement – provided training, support, and classes for students involved in Minority Mentoring Program.
- Office of Housing and Residence Life – provided professional development workshops for student staff; provide section of HHS125 for Connect (Transfer) students.
- Office of Service Learning and Leadership – provided professional and personal development workshops for student staff.
- Outdoor Adventures - provide personal development workshops for student staff.
- Special Support Services – provided personal and professional development training for student and professional staff.
- Staff Senate – provided personal development workshops for faculty and staff.
- TEAMQUEST – provide personal and professional development workshops for student staff and TEAMQUEST outside participants.

Current implementation of Life Design Catalyst Curriculum outside UNCG

- Two community colleges in Arizona – Paradise Valley Community College and Scottsdale Community College – who are currently using our curriculum as part of their Introduction to Career Development courses.
- Union College in Nebraska just created a Life Design course for a subset of new students on their campus as a pilot.
- Tennessee State University just received a Title IX Grant to implement Life Design work as part of their coaching program in Spring 2021, and implementation as a course in Fall 2021.
- Trinity College in Connecticut was just sent a proposal for a training of the members of their staff in a unit to combine the Office of Retention and Student Success with the Office of Career Services.

III. Recognition

- 2019: Received NC Idea Foundation Engage Grant, Start Something Now 7-Day Challenge, \$1,998
- 2018: Received a Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Advising Program from the National Academic Advising Association.
- 2017: Life Design Catalyst Program highlighted in article, “A Culture of Care” in the Chronicle of Higher Education as one of several programs at UNCG geared towards Student Success.
- 2013: Program (then called “Make College Matter”) chosen as one of nine Best Advising Practices through the Momentum Challenge, a program co-sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.