Fostering Employee Wellbeing Executive Summary

Overview

As we Imagine, Macalester, the Fostering Employee Well-Being Working Group was charged to create a shared understanding of employee well-being, noting that "the institution thrives when the people thrive." It is critical to differentiate "wellness" from wellbeing. Wellness speaks directly to the state of being in good health; whereas wellbeing is more holistic. For the purposes of our working group we identified that wellbeing encompasses physical, emotional, financial, social, occupational, intellectual, environmental and spiritual dimensions. Wellbeing provides direct links with happiness and satisfaction. Our aim then, is to attend to wellbeing at Macalester as it is shaped by **policies**, and **practices**. The intention with which we nurture or neglect wellbeing directly impacts the ability of our employees to flourish in the workplace.

Guiding principles for our work included **equity** and **transparency** in service of the people who make Macalester work. If we seek to deliver a transformational educational experience for our students, it is imperative that we provide a dynamic and desirable context in which our employees work. Macalester should lead and model what healthy workplace environments look like, creating policies and practices that can be emulated across higher education and in the places our graduates work. We are mindful that the foundational imperatives also include financial stability and social responsibility; putting our best ideas into practice will require re-examining the allocation of our finite financial resources if we are to live up to a genuine commitment to all three.

Our working group affirmed that we can make bold decisions to support dignity and thriving in the workplace. This will require dismantling systems of power that create disparities, and inhibit thriving and flourishing. The Division of Institutional Equity at Macalester reminds us that "equity requires attention to disparate impact, differential access and opportunities afforded to various communities, as well as structural and systemic barriers that limit potential and possibilities."[1] Mindful of this truth, our recommendations are intended to transform policies, procedures and practices so that they serve those who experience barriers to belonging, thriving and flourishing in the workplace. Community wellbeing and social responsibility are foundational imperatives of the *Imagine, Macalester* Plan. The report that follows sews these imperatives and guiding principles of **transparency** and **equity** into each recommendation, with the goal of creating a culture, community and campus that makes Macalester an exceptional - irresistible, even - place to work.

We begin by recommending that Macalester **work toward a culture of transparency**[2]. We believe that this will necessarily result in a more **equitable** workplace for all. The Senior Administration can lead by example to make Macalester a place where each employee feels that their voice is heard.

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[1] https://www.macalester.edu/equity/theoretical-frameworks-and-foundations/
[2] Inside Higher Ed

Well-Being at Macalester
The Working Group used the U.S. Surgeon General's outline[3] for employee mental health and well-being (right) as a guiding framework for identifying opportunities to expand support for well-being at Macalester. The framework specifies five key *pillars* that impact workplace well-being: Protection from Harm, Connection & Community, Work-life Harmony, Mattering at Work, and Opportunity for Growth. Our recommendations target these five areas to maximize impact on our campus community.

Making Macalester an Irresistible Place to Work
While the U.S. Surgeon General's outline provided a framework, our committee's iterative work and research led us to identify five *pathways* for interventions that target one or multiple workplace wellbeing pillars. These five pathways that bolster the five pillars are: enhance compensation, rethink and amplify physical space, support work-life harmony, provide and sustain robust professional development, and expand Human Resources capacity. Below are examples of how attention to these pathways can bolster these pillars.

Enhance compensation targets **protection from harm, work-life harmony, and mattering at work** pillars. We understand compensation to be a holistic category that includes salary, benefits, and growth, all of which are necessary for the survival and thriving of all Macalester employees. Our recommendations include:
- Committing to a "thriving wage"[4] with an eye towards Macalester's lowest paid employees.
- Providing a high-level review of benefits, leave-time and compensation with an eye towards equity and wellbeing.
- Reviewing and expanding leave policies pertaining to paid time off (PTO). Attention should be given to (and clarity provided for) bereavement leave, parental leave, and mental health days. The review should include consideration of when these benefits should begin for employees after hiring.
- Providing child care support for employees to thrive at work, either through more salient partnerships with off-campus resources, or other creative models.

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[3] https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/index.html
[4] A wage that provides full time employees enough to pay for necessities, have some disposable income, and save for the future.

When we *rethink and amplify physical space* for faculty and staff, we target the **protection from harm** and **community and connections** pillars. Macalester lacks spaces that center employee wellbeing; we have few inspiring and joyful spaces where one can step away from a desk to be nourished. This, paired with the intensity of the Macalester calendar, results in employees who are rarely "off," which is detrimental to wellbeing. Some physical spaces are not accessible to all, perhaps contributing to low feelings of belonging reported by employees with a long-term disability.[5] Our recommendations include:

- Ensuring accessible and welcoming spaces across campus.
- Creating dedicated space for faculty and staff to gather, connect, eat, and relax.
- Considering creation of co-working spaces to facilitate flexible and/or part time work while maximizing efficient use of current available space.
- Imagining generative spaces that foster human connection.
- Considering development of space that supports deep dialogue, such as an on- or off-campus retreat space.

Investing in our *support of work-life harmony* will touch each of the pillars outlined by the U.S. Surgeon General. Further it will involve a commitment to policies and practices that will help employees integrate their personal lives outside of Macalester with the important work they do on campus. This will enable employees to work sustainably and feel more invested in the institution, and more whole as individuals. To realize this, we recommend:

- Establishing a weekly 1-hour pause on campus to encourage well-being that allows for contemplation, movement, or connection. To encourage gathering, create a community space with healthy food provided[6].
- Developing a flexible work schedule framework consistent across campus and across supervisor changes. Advertise the policy in job descriptions as appropriate. Specifics may vary by office/line, but employees and supervisors should be equally aware of how the policy works in practice in their office.
- Being judicious in the volume of requests on nights, weekends and holidays that require employees to work or "volunteer" in large numbers. Create a clear compensated time policy for staff whose job requires them to work outside their normal hours, or pay them additionally for this time.
- Beginning the semester after Labor Day, and scheduling Orientation activities before (or after) Labor Day weekend in order to allow faculty, staff, and students to begin the semester well-rested.
- Reconsidering deadlines for mid-term and final grades to respect faculty break time, as we do for students.
- Making shifts that support balance, such as paid time away to volunteer off campus, in keeping with Macalester's commitment to civic engagement.
- Establishing healthy norms around transition time between meetings, opportunities for connection with colleagues, and non-digital communications.

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[5] HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey, Macalester Institutional Research, 2022
[6] Health-Partners Health Assessment data indicated room for improvement towards the daily goal of five fruits or vegetables, daily.

In order to *provide and sustain professional development opportunities*, we target the **connection and community, opportunity for growth and mattering at work** pillars. Investing in the growth of staff and faculty simultaneously expands the skills and resources they can leverage in their daily work, prepares them for advanced responsibilities and roles, and symbolizes that the institution cares about their career trajectories. We recognize that professional development takes many forms and recommend:
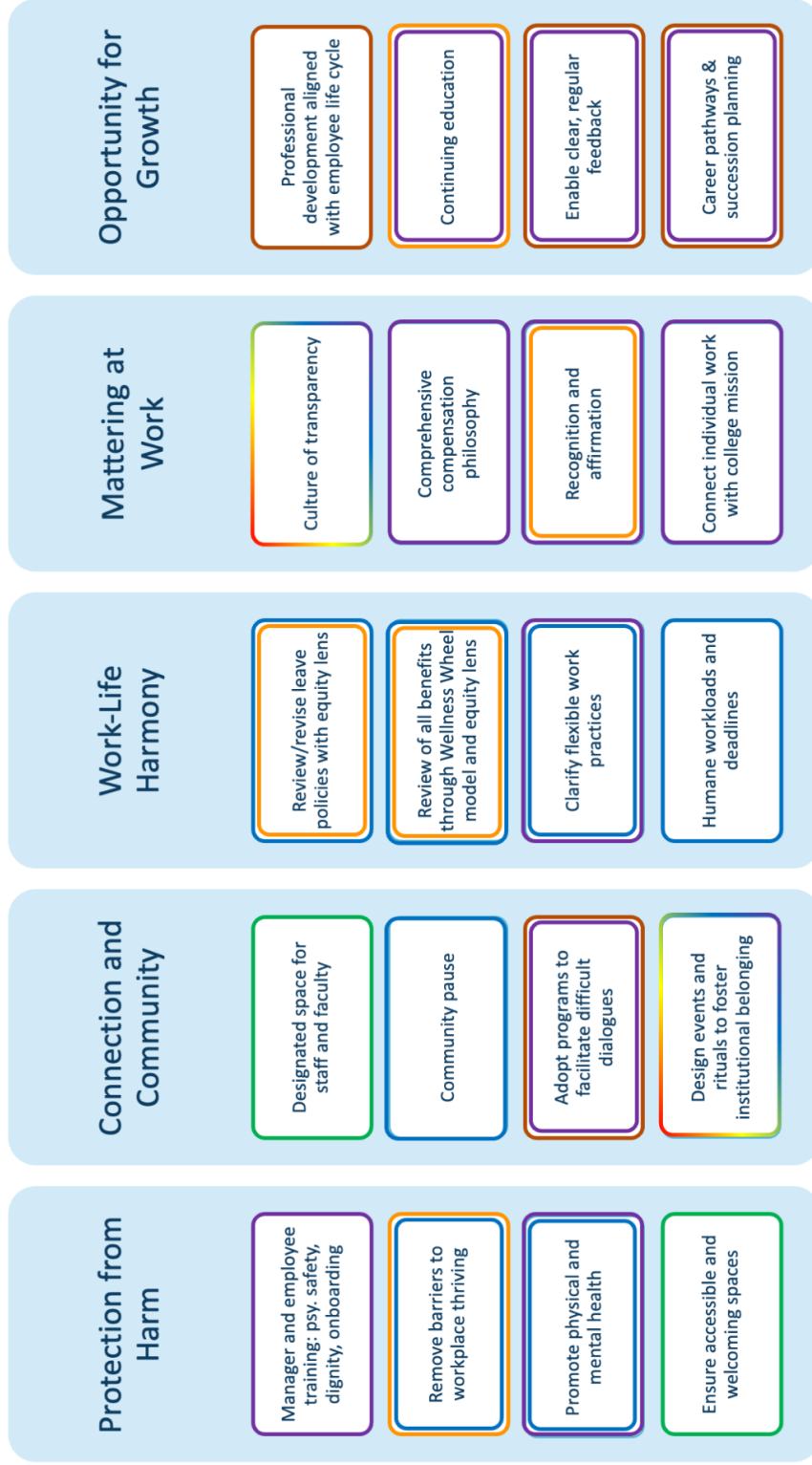
- Making robust professional development commitments to staff, as we do for faculty.
- Providing support for milestones through the life cycle of an employee; including pursuit of continued education relevant to position.
- Investing in developing managers and supervisors who are well supported and equipped to manage through periods of change and growth.
- Expanding the tuition benefit program to include continuing education for employees.
- Hosting events to encourage dialog and instill the same values in employees as we work to instill in students, namely respect and communication across differences.

Finally, it is abundantly clear that Macalester will need to *expand the capacity of Human Resources*. Our research pointed us back to Human Resources as a central point of growth for the college. Meaningfully investing in Human Resources would enable:

- An immediate comprehensive review of HR policies and practices that are in direct support of employees. Short term staffing in the form of consultants or contractors may be needed to build out an appropriate infrastructure.
- An overhaul and expansion of employee orientation and onboarding for ALL college employees. Employees should be oriented to the mission, values and philosophy of how we work.
- Comprehensive training for managers–including department chairs– emphasizing respect, flexibility, managing differences, and embracing diversity.
- A robust system of annual review for all employees, including opportunities for bi-directional feedback, and discussion of an employee's career pathways.
- Expanded recruitment possibilities, including the ability to offer more generous relocation packages to a wider range of employees, increasing our ability to hire employees without intergenerational wealth.
- More meaningful recognition of excellent work and career milestones. This could include financial incentives, but also consideration of ways we internally and externally amplify and celebrate excellent work at Macalester.

As we *Imagine, Macalester* the five pathways outlined in this summary create a roadmap that charts how we can move towards fostering employee wellbeing with intention. While our recommendations are many within each of the pathways, we hope this highlights the ample opportunities to invest anew in the people who make Macalester work.

Fostering Wellbeing

Protection from Harm

- Manager and employee training: psy. safety, dignity, onboarding
- Remove barriers to workplace thriving
- Promote physical and mental health
- Ensure accessible and welcoming spaces

Connection and Community

- Designated space for staff and faculty
- Community pause
- Adopt programs to facilitate difficult dialogues
- Design events and rituals to foster institutional belonging

Work-Life Harmony

- Review/revise leave policies with equity lens
- Review of all benefits through Wellness Wheel model and equity lens
- Clarify flexible work practices
- Humane workloads and deadlines

Mattering at Work

- Culture of transparency
- Comprehensive compensation philosophy
- Recognition and affirmation
- Connect individual work with college mission

Opportunity for Growth

- Professional development aligned with employee life cycle
- Continuing education
- Enable clear, regular feedback
- Career pathways & succession planning

Key: Compensation Spaces Work-life Professional Development Human Resources