

Springtide Research Helps Washington University Campus Ministers Create Deeper Connection with Students

INDUSTRY

Higher Ed

CLIENT

Troy Woytek

Director of Ministry,
Catholic Student Center (CSC)

CHALLENGE

Connect more deeply
with more students.

APPROACH

Adopted fundamental concepts from Springtide research to reframe mission and vision; embedded aspects of Relational Authority and the Belongingness Process to enhance relationship building with students.

RESULT

Deeper relationships with students uncovered new ways to expand the CSC as a community of care.

CHALLENGE

A desire to connect more deeply with students.

Troy and his team manage a roster of more than 1,100 students, offering a more traditional lineup of Catholic-based activities as well as social and service opportunities. Knowing the importance of relationship, they looked to Springtide's research to help them take a more intentional approach to connecting with students.

"Campus ministers get Relational Authority. That's what we do. [Springtide was] able to name something that we at the Catholic Student Center have always done. It's really easy in campus ministry to get super focused on programming and . . . to spend all your energy on programming. . . . We have a lot of programs as well, but [relationships] have always been a hallmark of our ministry here at CSC."

The synergy between CSC's present work and Springtide's research pushed the team to revamp both their mission and vision statements and use them as guideposts for future work.

"We're holding [relationship building] as a standard for ourselves, and it's continually making us think, 'How can we care more for our students?'"

—Troy Woytek

Director of Ministry, Catholic Student Center

"How can we care more so that we can build more trust and get to know them better? And as we get to know them better, [how do we] learn more about their needs so we can care more? And we're starting to see the impact [of that approach]."



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APPROACH

Troy and the team, which includes professional staff, ministry interns, and Catholic Student Union board members, recognized elements of both Relational Authority and the Belongingness Process in their current approaches and started using them to weave more intentionality into their work:

- They began to prioritize one-on-one meetings with students, setting them as a central focus for both ministry interns and staff. They take notes after every meeting with a student to capture important details.
- They charted weekly campus hours, tracking how much they're on campus with students and with which students they're interacting, to easily spot those who might remain on the margins.
- They created student "faces" directories to review before going into meetings. Seeing students' faces helps team members start associating faces with names and details. This helps them work their way through the Belongingness Process with students.

RESULT

Deeper relationships with students uncovered new ways to expand the CSC as a community of care. When it comes to Relational Authority, Troy said the biggest impacts come with care—listening to students' needs and issuing direct responses. The CSC team took three main actions based on what they heard from students:

- "We brought in a licensed therapist, who is available for free to our students, once a week for eight hours a day. We know in our student population that there is a mental health crisis . . . and we kept coming across students who we would get to know who would share these things. We'd get to a point in the conversation where [it became] beyond our expertise. We'd need to refer them to a therapist on campus, but the trust wasn't there. [It was important] to have someone who's here, who's confidential, that they can come and meet in a space that they're comfortable with."
- "We also have the student assistance fund for students who are in need financially—like when they need to go home for a funeral or an emergency but don't have the money for a plane ticket. That's something we're starting to see a bit more with some students now. That's showing care for those students."
- "We always had food for programs, but we never had snacks available 24/7 to our students. Now they can just come in and grab snacks. And we have students coming in that we probably never would have seen otherwise, simply because they've heard about the snacks. But there's a little bit of home care in that. . . . We can now notice [these students], get to know their name, and most importantly, get to know [them]."