

College Union Engagement Study

North Carolina State University Case Narrative

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Executive Summary

The site visit team gathered a depth of qualitative data focused on the learning and engagement that occurs in the Talley Student Union and Witherspoon Student Union. This report provides a thick description, aligned with qualitative research methodology of a case study at North Carolina (NC) State University, with a primary focus on the Talley Student Union. The Witherspoon Student Center is included in the case and serves a critical role on the campus for learning. The team did not spend as much time within the Witherspoon facility due to scheduling limitations; however, references will be made to the importance of the offices, people and physical space related to student learning and success. The following is a brief summary of the main themes that were discovered through the thick description.

Student Learning and Impact of Physical Space

The examples of student engagement factors that were present in the NC State student unions were connected to the design of the physical environment. The intentional design of the Talley Student Union created conditions that were optimal for student learning to occur. The Witherspoon Student Union created conditions that supported student learning and success for specific affinity groups. The following summarize the main themes related to learning and behaviors that contribute to engagement:

- **The learning that took place** for individual students centered on being “educationally productive” with their academic coursework.
- **Behaviors that contribute to learning** included open access space and tables that invited both individual work and group work to occur.
- **The learning that took place** was collaborative, where discussions with diverse others was facilitated by the physical presence of offices whose focus centered on student affinity groups.
- **Behaviors that contribute to learning** included the visibility of artifacts throughout the building that support the diverse perspectives of the students.
- **The learning that took place** for student employees in the Talley Student Union focused on their development of decision-making and leadership skills.
- **Behaviors that contribute to learning** for student employees created feelings of responsibility and ownership for the facility by trusting the students to make critical decisions independently.
- **The learning that took place** between faculty and students was a result of intentional academic course connections that facilitated a laboratory for learning.
- **Behaviors that contribute to learning** included the establishment of partnerships with academic units to connect course projects to the physical building.

Salience with the Role of the College Union Statement

The role statement for the college union articulates the outcomes associated with the intentional delivery of programs, services, and use of physical space (ACUI, 1996). Researchers observed that North Carolina (NC) State University created conditions that aligned with these outcomes in the following ways:

- a. *Complementing the academic experience:* Programs had been intentionally developed with academic departments in both the Talley Student Union and Witherspoon Student Union. Working closely with faculty, course assignments were being completed by students for academic credit in the union buildings. This high impact practice of hands-on learning and research also provided data to the student union staff.
- b. *First-hand experience in citizenship:* The Talley Student Union's events fostered real-world, hands-on opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and surrounding community to develop a sense of polity and responsibility for the campus and its constituents. Apprenticeships for local high schools, past events with the fraternity council, and even a future event for a higher education conference brought together academic, social, and societal organizations in one, unifying space.
- c. *Education to students surrounding leadership, social responsibility and values:* Learning within the Talley Student Union and Witherspoon Student Union was specifically associated to the offices housed within, rather than the entire structure. Having an office inside the union enhanced students' sense of responsibility for what happens outside the union. The 2016 "Die In" and similar student activism events showcase the campus' value for social responsibility.
- d. *Encouraging self-directed activity:* Whether an employee or not, students initiated activity on their own—responsibilities for or within the union were autonomous. Such cases were exemplified where student employees quickly acted to keep clients safe, professionally maneuvered relationships between the mixed-media team and campus faculty and staff, independently fulfilled duties within the union's offices, and non-employees independently worked individually or in groups.
- e. *Development of the person as well as intellect:* A focus on the holistic development of student leaders and employees were encouraged by supervisors by having students learn the foundations of their work and leadership positions, engage in conversations with faculty and diverse individuals/communities, and use new knowledge as a basis for navigating unfamiliar circumstances.

- f. *Gathering place for services and conveniences for daily life:* Significant differences between the Talley Student Union and Witherspoon Student Union are present in regards to providing services and conveniences. Talley is the primary location for food, study spaces, and access to student involvement on campus. Witherspoon has a 500-seat auditorium and is the location of campus publications, art galleries, services for the campus' military and veterans, culture centers, and other student-centered services.
- g. *Creates community formally and informally:* The Talley Student Union and Witherspoon Student Union have created community both formally and informally through the establishment of community-centered spaces where students from various backgrounds congregated. Talley is home to offices for student involvement, student government, fraternity and sorority life, a women's center, Union Activities Board, the GLBT Center, Center for Student Leadership/Ethics and Public Service, Multicultural Student Affairs, and the Graduate Student Association. The Witherspoon Student Union is home to Veteran's Affairs, the African American Cultural Center, a library, a dedicated prayer and reflection space, and an auditorium that is used regularly for academic courses. These spaces are designed to create conditions for students to gather for formal programs and to connect with others who look like them or who serve as allies.
- h. *Values diversity and honors each individual:* Primarily as a result of the affinity centers being housed within the student unions, a student's experience within the structure was focused on diversity. Affinity offices in both student unions offer students a sense of seeing and connecting to messages that may align with their individual identity.
- i. *Establishes a sense of connection to the institution:* Branding strategies within the NC State Student Unions created a sense of connection to the institution. The self-operated bookstore in Talley makes the facility a destination for those seeking material items that connect them to NC State—academically as an institution and culturally as referred to as the Wolfpack. Talley Student Union has also developed its own branding that visually indicated where individuals can find who and where to seek for help.

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Study Information

The college union has historically been a physical structure on campus that provides a space for the community to gather for social and intellectual conversations. At the core of *The Role of the College Union* (ACUI, 1996) are concepts related to how the college union provides an environment for learning, student success, and community building.

This project examined the outcomes associated with student engagement within a college union facility and developed an initial framework of how the role of the college union broadly contributes to student learning and success in a complex higher education environment. Modeling the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project, a research team utilized a qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998) to uncover conditions that impact student learning and success within a physical structure. This methodology examined phenomena bound by time and place including physical space design, use of space for programs and events, and individual and group behaviors at different institutional types. Documenting the use of physical space, student employment, programming, campus partnerships, policies, and practices enhanced the understanding of outcomes students gain from their college union. As a result, the research team gathered immense thick descriptions and candid voices that illustrated the purpose of the union in relation to student learning on today's college campus.

The focus on learning outcomes aligns with the national trends surrounding institutional development of a common set of learning outcomes for undergraduate students (AAC&U, 2016). Specifically focusing on the *Role of the College Union* to guide the research framework provided a foundation for understanding how the college union contributes to student success and learning. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, et al. (2005) note that the enacted mission of an institution is key to understanding the daily decisions of where and how students interact on campus. Recognizing how the mission of the institution aligns with the *Role of the College Union* will provide professionals with the evidence they need to enhance programs and services on their campuses, and think intentionally about building renovations.

This case summary report is the first step in the data analysis. Using the raw data from the site visit, researchers constructed a case study narrative (Patton, 2015). After the campus team has reviewed the case narrative for accuracy, the case will then be cross-analyzed with the five (5) other college union narrative cases. The narrative is a critical step in the process to ensure that we have an accurate picture of the college unions at North Carolina State University.

Role of the College Union Statement

The Talley Student Union demonstrates the Role of the College Union statement in each of its nine areas of purpose: complementing the academic experience, first-hand experience in citizenship education to students surrounding leadership, social responsibility and values, encouraging self-directed activity, development of the person as well as the intellect, gathering place for services and conveniences for daily life, creates community formally and informally, values diversity and honors each individual, and establishes a sense of connection to the institution (ACUI, 1996). Student employment programs that are housed in the organization provided a consistent connection to the role statement.

Summary of Observations:

- A. Since its grand re-opening in 2015, the Talley Student Union has emerged with a new vitality. Its towering five-story structure with glass exteriors, expansive lawn space, bustling community centers, and ample study areas is a hub for personal and leadership development for NC State students.
- B. With more than 1,200 student employees, the Talley Student Union engages students with tiered promotional tracks. Students are trained and then charged with taking personal ownership of projects while outstanding performers are allowed to apply critical thinking strategies to independently handle on-site challenges.
- C. Staff who demonstrate an intentionality about the student learning experience have fostered relationships with faculty producing unique classroom collaborations in assessment resulting in program improvements for the Talley Student Union.
- D. External collaborations bring work and learning experiences to underserved communities.
- E. The facility's centers provide safe and familiar spaces for underrepresented and marginalized populations.

Highlights from Each Area of Purpose:

The following narrative provides a picture of how the Talley Student Union put into practice the Role of the College Union:

Complementing the academic experience

Our visit collaborated with five (5) academic departments at NC State. Faculty worked with the Talley Student Union to design class assignments that provided students with assessment and research experience, hands-on learning; results from these assignments are shared with the Talley Student Union staff that inform facility usage and services. Elements of the academic linkages were not observed by researchers. Rather, they were chronicled in documents supplied by Talley Student Union and shared during staff employee focus group interviews. The specific academic linkages included:

- The College of Design: Nine undergraduate group projects explored Talley's usage of the facility's exterior. Results indicated a need for

additional bike racks and locations. A second collaboration with the department had students explore LEED Certification for Operations and Maintenance at Talley. The result was a fine tuning of operations that led to the submission of a LEED application and ultimately a LEED Platinum award.

- The College of Humanities and Social Science: Students conducted a composting pilot in Talley restrooms that indicated a need for clear signage to inform guests about the success of the composting program.
- The College of Education: Two qualitative research and data analysis projects were conducted by students enrolled in advance research courses. The first, explored the Talley design and operations while the second, examined Talley usage through ethnography.
- The Talley Student Union: Internships for students in Higher Education and Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management for event planning for the Park Alumni Center were created.
- The Talley Student Union: A graduate assistant was scheduled to be hired in 2017-2018 to support a Campus Enterprises initiative for student employee training and development.

These academic partnerships have not only been beneficial for the course participants but also for career preparation for Talley Student Union student employees. A Talley staff member detailed the value of the academic collaborations, stating:

“Most of the time, we have marketing majors and majors from our College of Design that work with our design department. So it’s really good at helping (students) figure out what they are doing in their classes so they can figure out what they need to do with their portfolios. We try to give them a wide span of environmental projects. This digital kiosk system was...designed in tandem with one of our students from our computer department.”

First-hand experience in citizenship

The term citizenship is contextualized by the role of the college union as it relates to volunteerism, student board involvement, committees and student employment. Citizenship, while not specifically referenced as this term, was a learning outcome of the student employment program in the Talley. The program provided hands-on learning for students and taught teamwork. Various student employee roles placed a high level of trust and responsibility for facility operations in the hands of student employees. Students articulated how that trust in their ability to serve the community resulted in them being more invested in the Talley Student Union as well as the NC State University community.

The union’s partnership with high school students enrolled in low-tech courses provided an avenue to become event technician interns through its student

employment programs. The goal was to provide real-world experience and practical knowledge to students who could benefit from exposure to the college atmosphere, potentially spurring future academic aspirations in a situation where college may be inaccessible. Such a partnership encouraged surrounding schools and its students to value not only the union's role in community development, but also the importance and impact of higher education for local citizens.

External events also contribute to the role of citizenship development. One example was the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life that hosted their annual event aimed at fostering citizenship. A graduate student employee detailed the event:

“In fraternity counsel, we hosted an alumni career fair in here with the academic purpose being to prepare citizens for North Carolina and the country abroad... (We) used the Talley ballrooms, opened two of them up, had 24 employers that were graduates of or were members of fraternities during their undergrad. We had about 300 men come in a do a career fair with them.”

Another example was the College of Education was in plans host a higher education conference in the student union where all banquet spaces were booked. This conference is to have workshops for undergraduates from NC State and other local institutions who are interested in pursuing work higher education.

Education to students surrounding leadership, social responsibility and values

Peer mentoring, activism and personal responsibility are shared experiences that were articulated as consistently happening within the Talley Student Union. A Union Activity Board (UAB) student articulated that merely serving in the glass-front leadership office makes her keenly aware of her responsibility as a student leader, “Because the space is so open, it makes me want to be more welcoming... It makes me want to present myself in the best way.”

The Talley Student Union was the site of a peaceful “Die In” demonstration in 2016 to protest the officer-involved shooting of Keith Lamont Scott and show solidarity with the people of Charlotte, North Carolina. This event was mentioned throughout the interviews to illustrate a commitment to having the Talley Student Union serve as a space for discussing social justice. A graduate student articulated the impact of the event:

“I think my favorite thing that has happened at Talley that aligns with the academic mission but it was challenged as being a part of the academic mission was the die-in that happened last year... on the ground floor of Talley in honor of Black Lives Matter and police brutality... While a lot of people questioned state dollars and being able to use state property for protesting, I think it was a good eye opener for a lot of students, specifically who were coming in and out of Talley to understand that there are students who are

marginalized on this campus whose voices need to be heard and part of the reason they are at this institution is because of their identity. Being able to see and witness that and have students feel like this space was empowering and that they were able to voice their opinions in a way that was indicative of their sentiments, it was really important for people to see.”

Numerous opportunities surrounding the education for students in the areas of leadership development, social responsibility and values are situated within individual offices housed within the unions. Students involved with organizations housed in the NC State Unions indicated a strong connection with the physical space of their offices claiming that this space was a home to them in the union, rather than a sense that the entire building contributed to a sense of being at home. In addition to students gaining a deeper sense of learning in these spaces, students said that being in the same physical space together was critical to valuing community on campus.

Encouraging self-directed activity

The Talley Student Union’s student employment program supported by its staff encouraged student employees to take ownership of their roles at the union--initiate the necessary steps to successfully fulfill their positions’ responsibilities whether or not a supervisor is present. Student employees who demonstrate leadership abilities were encouraged to make in-the-moment decisions on the job. During their employment training, students were instructed to treat their positions within the Talley Student Union as real-world jobs. A staff member articulated the student employment program’s development of self-directed activity by stating, “One of the major aspects of student engagement is, ‘This is a job,’...This is not your career job, but it is a job, so you’ve got to govern yourself as you’re supposed to be on a job.” The Talley Student Union IT/AV manager furthered the importance of students being self-directed, “You’ve got to be on time; you’ve got to be responsible; you’ve got to be reliable, communicate effectively, not wait ‘til the last minute. That’s the main thing. No matter what we do here, we’re trying to prepare you for your career job.”

Student employees were able to make self-guided decisions using internal and external resources provided by their supervisors. One example is when a student building manager recalled an evening when she was on duty during high-wind, hurricane conditions; all full-time professionals were gone for the day. A group was meeting in a fifth floor conference room when the exterior glass walls began to shake. Without calling or seeking advice from a supervisor, she assessed the safety of her clients, secured a meeting space on a lower level, and moved the group meeting. The student shared, “The supervisor can give us tools but we make the decision to move people...When we are on shift, we are the front point of contact for the clients. The supervisors don’t baby us.”

Another example of autonomous responsibility is how the Multi-Media team encouraged its student employees to take full responsibility when working with on-

campus clients to establish audio-visual needs. The IT/AV manager reaffirmed the value in responsible independence:

“[Students] have access to wide networks across campus so if you push the wrong button, you’ll take the system down...But some of the students still get access to them. (I tell them), ‘This is very serious. You’re going to vet; you’re going to sign all this paperwork; you’re going to meet with the big bosses across campus and other departments... and then you’re going to be a representative.’ So we try to give them that responsibility piece... We try to give them that full 360-view of being on a team (and) being responsible in that corporate environment.”

Elements of self-directed student behavior were observed in two ways: a) student employees in the Talley Student Union were seen working independently in the student union’s various centers and food-service restaurants and b) students sitting alone or in groups were spotted engaged in self-directed activity by either reading, working on their laptops or cell phones on each floor of the five-story building. Students working alone or with others said the facility’s design with its curved interior walls, tall glass windows with long views of the exterior tree-lined walkways, courtyards and grassy outdoor spaces made the Talley Student Union a draw as a gathering place on campus.

Development of the person as well as intellect

Programming at the Talley Student Union had learning outcomes to expand student norms, conventional thinking and experiences. Its centers (Multicultural, GLBT, Women) were used liberally in this way. A graduate student employee boasted:

“Most of our centers are in [Talley]... We all do programming; that’s a part of the mission of all of our offices that we’re planning some form of not strictly academic learning but some type of alternative learning for our students outside of the classroom. There’s always some type of program going on here; there’s always some type of activity.”

Formal programming or informal interactions within the NC State Unions indicate that conditions have been created for student development (cognitive, interpersonal, and/or intrapersonal) to occur for those who want to engage directly with the services/programs. Graduate students working in the building noted that “If you want to get involved... whether its people who are just sitting in a specific office, you’re always learning in some capacity and being surrounded by people who are engaging in different conversations or are speaking on what our president has said today...(There are) just different things that you can do outside of the classroom that can enhance your life outside of strictly academic learning.”

The personal and intellectual development of those who used student unions at NC State was not limited to the Talley Student Union. The Witherspoon Student Center

contained self-guided student services offices where staff members mentored students of these affinity groups here. The building includes an art gallery, study area, and a soaring auditorium. The auditorium was utilized by academic affairs for large lecture classes during the day; the activities board had access to the space in the evening and weekends for movies, speakers, and performances. The African American Cultural Center was an ideal place for intellectual development with a library of cultural books, videos, and other resources; it also played host to Afro-centric lectures, artists, discussion groups and community forums.

Gathering place for services and conveniences for daily life

The Talley Student Union offered a myriad of services that are a part of the student life experience. Perspective students learned about the Talley from their on-campus tours as a place to go for basic services and student involvement. New and experienced students alike were encouraged to explore the services offered at the Talley; this very structure was a regular destination for campus goers. As a convenience for students and staff, both unions were examples of making exploration of ways to get involved in campus easy; the long list of services in each building bundled student gathering in one, central location. Further, an active use of Witherspoon's auditorium exposed students to groups and events that exist on their campus that would have gone otherwise unnoticed. Such student and staff led programs and services unique to the Talley included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Women's Center
- Lactation Room
- Union Activities Board
- GLBT Center
- Fraternity & Sorority Life
- Offices for Student Government & Student Involvement
- Graduate Student Association
- Center for Student Leadership, Ethics, & Public Service
- Student Employment Offices

In addition to these offices, spaces geared towards servicing students' life needs included:

- Talley Market (food)
- Information Desk (help)
- Mailroom (communication/business)
- Lost & Found (security)
- Bookstore (materials)
- Wolfpack Outfitters (gear/clothing)
- Wolf Express (print and copy)
- Theatre (entertainment)
- ATMs (money)

While other parts of campus offered more than twenty (20) locations for students to eat and study, including two libraries, the union serves as a one-stop location that meets a host of student needs. “Talley is a one-stop shop from 8 to 10 where you can eat, meet friends and do everything you need to do,” said a UAB student leader. “I have a to-do list and Talley allows you to do what you need to do to get through the day. I tell people how open, beautiful and useful it is.” A number of students said that dining and studying are two of the Talley Student Union’s biggest draws.

Students also claimed the Talley Student Union as an excellent alternative to NC State’s libraries. A graduate assistant justified this claim:

“I primarily work on the fifth floor so on the two floors – the fourth and fifth floors - there’s always a lot of group studying going on or group projects. (This) is hard to do at the library unless you have a room reserved and then it’s harder to reserve a room because there’s 36,000 of us. So I’m sure this is one of the easier places on campus to come to have those group projects and use the white board that’s floating around the floor somewhere. I think that group learning happens a lot here.”

Complimentary to the union’s vast selection of services and offices, the eclectic collection of furniture makes the Talley Student Center’s physical space inviting and versatile. It features a minimum of eight styles of furnishings that range from high-back chairs and curved padded seats for two, to tall tables with matching seats, and S-shaped lounge sofas that are long enough to accommodate four people seated with one of them completely stretched out for sleeping. A student shared their view on the appeal to the convenience and productive use of these work spaces: “There are (furniture) options to do group work and group study. There’s also a lot of independent furniture. Even if you wanted to study by yourself you can come here but still feel surrounded by others who are in the same boat.”

Creates community formally and informally

The Talley Student Union has created community both formally and informally through the establishment of community-centered spaces that is open to the entire campus community. Formal community is created with intention; services, spaces, offices, even architecture are crafted with a connective purpose and have a predictable outcome for the building, campus, community, students, staff, and faculty. Such examples in the Talley and Witherspoon were connections to offices for student involvement, student government, fraternity and sorority life, and the many more previously listed.

The centers, student government offices and associations housed in the Talley Student were intended to give students an experience that differs from the academy of other structures on a campus known for its competitive science, engineering and agricultural programs. The senior director of NC State’s community centers explained this comparison:

“The sense that they get in this building would be different than the sense that they get at the university. There’s the bureaucracy of things and NC State is still a very conservative institution overall. And then you look even conceptually at the brand – the brand of being a technical university with straight lines and glass and iron...it tends to translate to the perception and the operation of the institution as well.”

Further, the director described the purposeful design to activities tailored to NC State’s student population. To support first-generation students in feeling welcomed on campus, Talley Student Union created spaces that reflect the art, artifacts, ambience, literature and atmosphere connected to its users’ identities. “When it comes to building a sense of community for underrepresented groups, the aim is for each space to be designed in ways that make members within those communities feel welcome, safe and familiar,” the senior director said, adding, “In our perspective in looking at underrepresented and marginalized populations, there’s kind of an assumption to just create this circle of community where we can, but my philosophy as a new director is to expand it as much as it can within that box.”

Even student employment within the unions was credited as creating a community by its student employees. An agriculture student, working as a Talley Student Union building manager, reflected on the impact of their employment on their sense of belonging: “When I got here, I was overwhelmed. Even though I live one hour from here, it felt like home was a million miles away.”

Within the formal community structure, the researchers observed through intercept conversations students of various ethnicities and races conversing and planning group projects in each of the student union’s centers. At the MSA center, a number of students settled into single-seat areas that flanked one large round table. An ethnically diverse group was seated at the round table where they were simultaneously doing homework, napping and catching up on the week’s events.

The undergraduate student recalled that during her first months on campus, the Talley Student Union was the place where she would purchase a meal and take it to her residence hall to eat. Socially, her time was spent at the agricultural school where friends told her about the great things that were happening at the Talley Student Union. The peer interaction and discussion led her to take the following action stating “Eventually, I met a sorority sister who encouraged me to get a job here,” she said. “I started pushing my boundaries and got the job.”

In comparison to formal community building, informal community emerges without intention; gatherings, events, meetings, even relationships form from the potential opportunities the unions provide. Such examples in NC State’s student unions were observed when students congregated without requirement or structure. Students were seen eating and talking in groups near restaurant spaces and at study tables on

levels two, three and four in the Talley. Other groups of students were observed seated and talking in the facility's outdoor seating area.

A student, seated in a quiet space on the third floor and talking with a friend, described the union a place for community. "I meet friends here, eat and study here," they said. "This is a central location and I like it because the walls are open, the atmosphere is bright; it's welcoming." Another student said, "It's a good place for community. It's expansive. You have multiple centers upstairs, resources; you can find tables in the lobby and the website (lists) what Talley has going on."

Another student compared the "vibe" of the Talley to a family reunion. "You know a family reunion?" asked an African American freshman who works in the Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA) center. "Do you know what it's like to walk into a certain space? It's the vibe.... it's like when my family has family reunions all over the country and you get to the hotel and you feel it. I get that feeling here," he added. Although family reunions themselves are formally created, a date is set and a group of people do the organizing, the "family reunion" described by this student was not a formal intention of those programming happenings in the unions.

A similar sense of community was described about the GLBT Center: "When I first came on campus, I spent my time in the LGBTQ Center," a student said. "I was invited out during my freshman year. I actually found roommates from there. It helped me find myself and helped me to feel comfortable being here."

Values diversity and honors each individual

As affinity centers are housed within the Talley Student Union and the Witherspoon Student Union, the unions are environments that value and honor diversity as a spotlight for student experiences. Such diversity enhances the union users' opportunities to develop an individual niche, a group—this sense of belonging and safety can bond them to the campus, community, and ultimately to the union itself.

A graduate student identified a sense of belonging to the union by taking advantage of the variety of opportunities offered: "The variety of centers in here that allow for the multitude of different students, (allows) you to find your group," she said. "The amount of people that I see hanging out in the GLBT Center or the Women's Center just sitting there not even necessarily doing anything programmatically but just having conversation, I think really contributes to that."

Another graduate student expressed feelings of safety and individual respect, sharing an experience where a hand-written sign that leaned against the window of the GLBT Center forbade onlookers to take photos of those inside as a way of protecting the privacy of its inhabitants. "...[the center] recently put a sign in their window that says, 'Please don't take pictures of anyone in here,'" they expressed with surprise, further adding, "The fact that the centers do things of that nature to protect the students that are using it is also incredibly beneficial."

The focus on diverse centers entices those who would otherwise feel they have no need to visit the union. One student shared that if the Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA) office was not located within the student union, she may not have spent as much time in the facility as a freshmen or sophomore. “With the MSA being right downstairs, I think that plays a huge role with those marginalized groups being in that space,” this student said. “But being that the MSA was in Talley and the GLBT was in Talley, or the Women’s center, I think that does bring a lot of the students from those marginalized groups that might not otherwise take up space in this space.”

Establishes a sense of connection to the institution

The Talley Student Union was described by staff and students as the single campus facility that provided students their connection to the university. From the enticing tile floor inlay at the entryway of the campus’ iconic Bell Tower, to the folklore created by students about never stepping on the emblem for fear of not graduating, the new edifice has emerged as the focal point for the campus culture referred to as the Wolfpack.

Many undergraduate students illustrated this connection by sharing their views on the importance of the union. One graduate student employee said that for students on campus, “this is where they bring their parents first, saying this *is* NC State essentially. You want to show them the house first. I see a lot of students with their parents here all the time.” In fact, official university tours start and end at the Talley Student Union and its towering presence is used liberally in NC State’s marketing campaigns. “The school uses Talley on all of its promotional material,” Another student confirmed, “It’s always the building that’s front and center.”

As if the building was not attractive enough, the Talley Student Union has been known to allure students and visitors to NC State with its unique sweet treat. “I work with College Advising and this is always the last stop we made on tours of state ‘cause you could check it out and get ice cream. That was a huge selling point that attracted them to the school,” said a graduate student employee about Howling Cow, the university’s own ice cream brand made on site for more than half a century through the institution’s Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Science.

The Talley Student Union is the beginning and the end of campus tours, an impressive starting point for campus visitors, and a showcase for NC State’s promotional materials and product branding — connection and belonging are the hallmarks of the student experience. “The sense of belonging is just such a critical output of the student environment and being able to just connect with your environment and feel like you’re welcomed allows you to feel more confident in those classes and engage in what you’re studying,” a graduate student employee confirmed, “Even if it’s a secondary effect, that sense of belonging that you get from being here can further that.”

Student Engagement Factors

Researchers used Engagement Indicators from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as a basis for observation and analysis of data during this study. The Engagement Indicators include Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, and Campus Environment. Elements of each Engagement Indicator were revealed during the site visit. Representative instances of Academic Challenge were apparent in student use of the building, and with academic partnerships that use the union as a laboratory for examining practical problems and situations. Data from the study revealed strong incidences of Learning with Peers, with collaborative learning observed throughout the facility, especially in lounges and areas where two or more people could sit together at a table. Experiences with Faculty indicators were less evident through direct observation of student-faculty interaction. However, similar outcomes are apparent in other union initiatives, including student employee training and development. Campus Environment factors were strongly evident in Talley, with interviewed students expressing high quality interactions with other students and staff in the building, and representative examples of institutional supportive resources.

Academic Challenge

The learning that took place included strategies for higher-order, reflective and integrative learning, with the physical building serving as a conduit for student engagement. Students took advantage of the many lounges, alcoves, and quiet study spaces throughout the building, particularly on the top two floors of the union. Students were observed studying, reviewing materials from class, and working on group projects. Different styles of furniture were placed throughout the building, recognizing that individual preferences vary in regard to what type of furniture is most comfortable and conducive to studying. Staff indicated that since opening the renovated Talley Student Union, they had increased the number of tables and chairs in response to student requests. Researchers observed students engaged in conversation at tables, including engrossed discussions of current issues. Of particular note was a large circular table in the Multicultural Student Affairs office where students shared their diverse perspectives.

Engagement Indicator: Academic Challenge

The following were observed:

- *Learning Strategies* – reviewing materials from classes independently and in groups
- *Higher-Order Learning* – applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations
- *Reflective & Integrative Learning* – connected learning to societal problems or issues; including diverse perspectives

Interviewed faculty noted being impressed seeing so many students in Talley Student Union doing homework and writing papers, referencing that “the new Talley

became the place for students to be productive educationally.” Specifically, the faculty felt the environment itself, which includes food options and comfortable seating, contributed to the space being conducive to students studying. A faculty member articulated how they see the union culture as a place for learning stating “Sometimes the library is eerily quiet; not the same way people interact here.” Additionally, they indicated that the union’s recent renovation was certainly connected to the academic mission, highlighting sustainability initiatives directly. Some believe that students use the architectural design of the building to expand their learning, offering: “I’ve seen non-architect students looking at the building, amazed with the structure. They are looking at how the beams are working, holding up the roof. The design of the building is fostering a sense of inquiry.”

Staff described the regularity with which students are “exposed to other people’s ideas, learn of different peoples’ experiences.” They further indicated that people will have debates at the lobby tables, bringing “what you are doing in the classroom to another level.” They also noted that students reserve meeting rooms to work on group class projects.

Another example of Academic Challenge, particularly Higher-Order Learning, is evident from Talley Student Union leaders’ efforts in partnering with academic units to host projects and research initiatives. A landscape architecture class had nine projects focused on the exterior of the facility; Talley was a LEED Laboratory in a project with the College of Design; a composting pilot was initiated with the College of Humanities and Social Sciences; and two qualitative research projects were completed with the College of Education. Such academic partnerships allow student learning by applying facts, theories or methods to practical problems or new situations.

Student employees articulated the way in which they learn through their experiences at Talley. The quotes below are indicative of how their roles not only helped them gain work-related skills, but also developed ways to navigate and feel connected to the campus by engaging with the union through an academic lense.

- “People stop by UAB to ask questions, I gain experience in brand management, sales.”
- “As a cultural anthropologist student, working at Talley helped me understand the culture of NC State sooner.”
- “I always feel like I am learning something.”
- “We used Talley’s mission statement to come up with our own building manager mission statement.”

Learning with Peers

The learning that took place included collaborations and discussions with diverse others. The design of the building and furniture placement provided a physical

environment that was conducive to student interaction and cooperative learning. Additionally, there are numerous campus resources located in the Talley Student Union, encouraging much of the student population to visit the building. The intentionality of designated services and destination value provided general opportunity for students to engage in discussions with students different than themselves.

Engagement Indicator: Learning with Peers

The following were observed:

- *Collaborative Learning* – numerous groups were observed working on academic projects using the intentional spaces created in the unions
- *Discussions with Diverse Others* – students from multiple races, ethnicities, and different beliefs were frequently sitting together throughout the building engaged in conversation

Students were observed engaged with peers in seating areas throughout the building, working together on course projects. While such engagement did occur in soft seating lounges, the most common furniture for such interactions were tables and chairs. Students also used free-standing white boards for collaborative brainstorming and problem solving. As previously

mentioned, a large circular table in the Multicultural Student Affairs office was effectively used for such learning. Researchers also recognized collaborative learning in more populated and noisy areas, such as seating in restaurants, space next to the coffee shop, and at exterior tables adjacent to the main floor windows.

Faculty emphasized the prominent diversity of students that exists in the Talley Student Union, and the resulting positive benefits. “I saw students of mixed races talking to each other because it’s so open and friendly. I think it is very supportive” and “This place has become a place that supports and enriches diversity.” Additionally, the ground floor of the Talley Student Union was a bustling area with a diverse representation of the campus community. The students, faculty, staff were navigating through the ground level with some moving through the space, others stopping in one of the multiple food service areas, going to the bookstore, or taking advantages of the services within (i.e., id office, service desk, or copy center). These opportunities for interactions between each other created chances for students to have discussions with diverse others. For example during the site visit, Navy recruiters were in the lobby engaging students with exercise equipment. Such interactions allow for discussions among people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and views.

Students also recognized the opportunities to engage in discussions with diverse populations. A graduate student noted that “Talley helps students discover themselves; offices like the GLBT Center, the Women’s Center, the Multicultural Student Affairs Center, Student Government, Fraternity/Sorority Life, Student Involvement, allow students to explore different avenues; that image not only takes

up the top two floors, but pours down the rest of the building.” An undergraduate building manager felt she had a “much more diverse set of friends from working here.”

Three advocacy offices located in the building (GLBT, Women’s Center, Multicultural Student Affairs) contributed to the sense of diversity in the union. While researchers observed the offices being used by students, it was unclear whether students who are not associated with the affinity groups are actively encouraged to enter the space. The large windows and open doors create an inviting condition; however, it was unknown if new individuals frequently entered or the same students typically occupied the space. Additionally, programs offered in the building and facilitated by the offices provided deliberate interaction with NC State peers, colleagues, and fellow stakeholders. For example, the MSA center sponsored a program involving a mariachi band the day prior to the site visit interviews. Multiple interviewees commented on the program, which created discussions among diverse populations with the research team.

Experiences with Faculty

The learning that took place included student-faculty interaction in the Talley Student Union and effective teaching practices through the union’s student employment program. A small group of students were observed interacting with their faculty instructor in a soft seating lounge on the third floor. While clearly not meeting in their usual classroom, the faculty member was describing a project to be carried out for the semester. Faculty also interact with students through committees, including a faculty representative appointed by the Chair of the Faculty to the Student Centers Board of Directors. While researchers did not directly see the delivery of student employment training courses, they did observe Talley staff regularly checking-in and offering guidance to student employees.

Engagement Indicator: Experiences with Faculty

The following were observed:

- *Student-Faculty Interaction* – focused on the partnership with the union to host academic class projects using the union as a laboratory
- *Effective Teaching Practices* – using the union as the classroom was a teaching strategy used to illustrate difficult points

Within a document review of the Talley Student Union, materials revealed strong intentionality to engage student employees in learning . The director’s introductory letter in the annual report noted that “we take pride in developing our student employees.... We provide them with unique opportunities for a well-rounded experiential education, making them some of the most sought-after graduates in the country among potential employers.” Additionally, recruitment materials were clear to identify student employment objectives and learning outcomes – promote diversity, develop transferable skills, practice critical thinking, increase awareness, and experience community.

Talley administrative staff saw their role as educators: “I have been lucky enough to work on projects to ensure our team members develop skills and meaningful experiences that relate to their future goals.” A supervisor referenced meetings each semester between students and supervisors to assess use of transferable skills; a senior administrator referenced the aspiration of advancing the skills set of students.

Students employees in Talley recognized the value of working at Talley and the applicability of what they had learned, sharing: “NC State student centers has developed my professional skills, which have made me competitive for internships and jobs in my career field. Working here has made me feel more connected to campus and has pushed me to be involved in other student organizations” another student employee shared “Working for NC State Student Centers has encouraged me to find my niche through development of my work ethic, management skills, and relationships with my coworkers.” Student employee retention rates reveal a majority (57%) return to Talley, with 16% graduating, and 14% leaving for high impact internships and jobs.

Campus Environment

The learning that took place was supported through quality interactions with students and staff in the Talley Student Union, as well as a supportive environment with institutional resources to help them succeed. Students detailed their heavy use of Talley, including positive interactions with other people where opportunities exist

Engagement Indicator: Campus Environment

The following were observed:

- *Quality of Interactions* – the staff of the union (professionals and student employees) were consistently engaged with individuals in the facility
- *Supportive Environment* – staff regularly were checking with each other and student staff to ensure they had the resources/information needed; the offices in the unions focus on providing involvement opportunities and encourage contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)

for students to be involved in campus activities and events that examine social and political issues.

Students appeared to be comfortable in the lounge spaces throughout the Talley. A range of engagement with such spaces included those that were social (chatting, using smart phones, and laughing with one another), academic (reading text books, working on laptops, and group discussions), and personal (sleeping, reading, sitting quietly, and using their

smart phones). The State Ballroom houses a multitude of programs and events where specially designed spaces, like the Stewart Theatre and Senate Chambers,

encouraged student involvement. Having NC State's arts housed in the Witherspoon Student Union provided ample, unique experiences for students to be exposed to performing and visual arts programs. During the site visit, *Sense and Sensibility* was scheduled to perform in the theatre, and an adjoining display case provided passive learning about the play. Artwork was plentiful with the majority created by NC State students. A large 3,000 square foot space, designated as a student involvement center, was intended to support NC State's 700 student organizations. At the time of data collection, there was little activity in this space. Separate space was dedicated to the student government and the union activities board. Other support offices exist in the building, including GLBT; Women's Center; Multicultural Student Affairs; Fraternity and Sorority Life; and the Center for Student Leadership, Ethics and Public Service. Resources to support academic success are also available, such as the bookstore and copy center.

Interviews of the Talley professional staff revealed formal efforts to create an environment that encouraged engagement. A number of the Talley staff reflected on the renovation of the facility and shared that a "major cultural switch since the renovation, like mixed use in a community, students interacting." Another Talley staff member shared, "It should be a building you can find anything you want here, your niche, feel welcome." Staff members in Talley also articulated that the design has an impact on how the students feel stating, "You can see it in the space... because we've tried to create a safe space for everyone; lower ceiling, fireplace has created a physical cozy space, allows for conversations." A number of the student affairs directors were also clear to indicate the design alone does not create the environment, but that they have an important role in its implementation, stating, "I think it is our staff, and our department, and our mentality about how to use the space. You could have the same building, different staff, wouldn't be the same; we're nimble, at root of the change is what's best for students."

An interview with senior leaders of the Division of Student Affairs, Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity, and Campus Enterprises reinforced the idea of intentionality to enhance the campus environment through a renovated Talley. A student affairs leader who had previously served as a center director indicated that the "old Talley was not a real union, not robust... we wanted students to come, night and day." The Associate Vice Chancellor for Campus Enterprises stated that the "old Talley didn't need to be open after 9:00 PM, could shoot a cannon down the hall; now here all hours, everything we wanted it to be." Another participant in the group interview noted that Talley is "one of three places where people come, students see each other, interact with the community." In summarizing the change since the renovation, a member of the student affairs division indicated "people have garnered a sense of belonging; this is where I go, even the disengaged student could sit here and still feel like I belong."

Students also expressed value in the campus environment created through their interactions and the support that exists in student union. Graduate students noted that it is “a place you can find anything you need to be successful at NC State” and “vibrant, you feel more of a human at Talley.” Undergraduate students described the union as a place to meet other people, study, and satisfy academic and basic needs. Some comments from frequent union student-users and building managers were:

- “I use Talley as a working space and learning space.”
- “I always describe it as an open space with a bunch of people; you can get your studying done, one-stop-shop, social, working building; beautiful building where can get work done.”
- “[The union is] a touchdown space – homework, food, hang out with friends.”
- “I now have a much more diverse set of friends from working here.”
- “I like to think of us as not just co-workers, but we’re also friends.”

NC State NSSE 2014 Result Connections

According to the North Carolina State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning, NC State’s last participation in NSSE was 2014. The NSSE 2014 Snapshot Report for NC State University revealed that a number of indicators are significantly higher for both first-year and senior-year students. The snapshot indicated that first-year students had no significant difference in the comparisons for Learning with Peers; however seniors reported Learning with Peers as significantly higher. The qualitative data indicated that the perception among students is that more first year students use the Talley Student Union. Reviewing the data in the thick description, the research team noticed that Learning with Peers was a significant observation in the Talley Student Union by the research team. The African American Cultural Center and the Military and Veteran Resource Center in Witherspoon were observed to have conditions that were optimal for learning with peers. Further examination of the relationship between the unions’ physical spaces and the engagement indicator around learning with peers should be explored to identify specific learning outcomes that can be attributed to engagement in the unions. The snapshot also eluded that the campus environment indicator was significantly higher across the board for both first- and senior-year students. The consistency could be viewed as an indication that conditions are present within the campus environment to support learning. Additionally, the experiences with faculty were significantly higher across the engagement indicators in the snapshot indicating that the practice of using the union as an academic classroom laboratory should be considered a high impact practice.

Findings related to Physical Space

Use and Impact on Space Design

The Talley Student Union re-opened in 2015 with reimagined spaces across five-floors for a purposeful mix of open and designated spaces to foster a sense of belonging to the NC State campus community. The Talley Student Union was described by staff and students as the place where they began their connection to the university through their very first campus tour, which began and ended at Talley. This dynamic space provided basic needs for a sense of safety and belonging (fourth and fifth floor programmatic offices), opportunities for connections and community (programming space and dining space on the second and third floors), and opportunities for engagement and learning. The Talley Student Union was located in a central location on the campus. As a result, the student and community traffic patterns made the Talley an important destination for services and amenities.

The image of the Talley Student Union was utilized on many university-wide promotional materials. The role of artifacts in the environments showcased pride in the institution—the school’s seal, values, and alma mater are artfully woven into the design of the spaces along with a use of the university’s mascot and colors. Each of the five floors had its own identity and purpose to assist in moving students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors through the massive space that feels like multiple, smaller and manageable spaces all under one, centrally located roof. The Tally Student Union was a point of destination for many across the campus.

As stated earlier in the report, the Talley Student Unions is “a welcoming place for learning, belonging and serving as the nexus for community building.” One of the many success stories in the new Talley Student Union was the focus on the placement of many student-centered program and service offices. The five floors of the Talley Student Union had their own defined role and provide direction for the use of the varying types of physical spaces (i.e., lounges, departments, centers, and services) on each floor. An example of this was observed and reiterated in an interview about the placement of the GLBT Center and the Women’s Center on the fifth floor along with the Multicultural Student Affairs office on the fourth floor. Students who were interested in these spaces go to the union, and are willing to go all the way up the fourth and fifth floors to participate in activities sponsored by those departments/centers and/or to simply hang out in the spaces. Many interviewees indicated that housing university program offices in a prominent university facility provided the impetus for students to cross campus to gather and find opportunities for engagement in one unifying location.

Types of Activities and Engagement Indicators for Learning

In the framework of the engagement indicators, the Witherspoon Student Union offered opportunities for learning and engagement within its limited but well used space. The observations during a tour of the facility uncovered that a key component for this building was the African American Cultural Center served as a major point of destination. Not only was the cultural center

The behaviors that contribute to learning were found in the formal course presentations and the programming and activities sponsored by the units in the Witherspoon. The physical spaces that foster a supportive environment and a sense of

critical to drawing students, faculty, and staff to Witherspoon, but both the large meeting room and library housed within cultural center, provided complementary spaces that supported the mission of the cultural center. The additional student centered spaces (i.e., Veteran Services and Student Media) served in similar ways for students directly involved in related programs and services. Witherspoon's prayer space and large auditorium were two additional spaces that created opportunities for engagement. The prayer space fostered informal, unstructured community building depending on how individuals use the space while the larger auditorium traditionally hosted formal, structured learning through academic classes, campus lectures, and movie series. The engagement indicators observed included academic challenge, learning with peers, experience with faculty, and campus environment.

Utilizing the engagement indicators, the Talley Student Union provided ample physical spaces throughout the five floors where learning can take place. Observations are identified by floor and by the respective engagement indicators.

First Floor. The first floor is partially underground. The public area on this floor was the university bookstore, Wolfpack Outfitters. The main access to this floor was located inside of the bookstore on the second floor of the Talley Student Union. Of the four engagement indicators, Campus Environment was observed in both Quality of Interactions (i.e., bookstore employees engaged with customers) and Supportive Environment (i.e., bookstore employees engaged with one another and customers).

The behaviors that contribute to learning were found in the quality of the transactions within the self-operated bookstore.

Second Floor. At ground level, the second floor generated major thoroughfare from all sides to cross through. The second floor has a major outdoor space which is nestled between two arms of the facility on the north side, a well-used pathway on the external parameter of the facility, and outdoor space. A number of resident halls laid adjacent to Talley and this outdoor pathway weaved throughout the residential areas. On the other side of the Talley, which was considered the front entrance, the campus recreation building and a number of academic buildings were situated.

The behaviors that contribute to learning were found in the welcoming environment and the quality interactions between the Talley staff and the campus community. It was also found in the informal and formal connections students engage in throughout the various seating/lounge areas.

The second floor had the most open space along with all of the designated dining areas, coffee shop, ice cream store. A number of services located on this floor including the information desk, the ID card office, the Princeton Review office, and the bookstore gave way to its significant traffic. Here, the atrium was located with a multi-story sculpture featuring the mascot and the seal of

the institution. The hallways were wide and limited lounge-like space was available for individuals to sit down, relax, and meet up with others. Aside the atrium was the Talley Student Union Information Desk, which was always staffed; it appeared to be a location where many seek information and assistance. The openness of the second floor affords a great opportunity to see and be seen.

The intentional design of the second floor supported individuals moving through the Talley Student Union, and instituting easy access to food services and a variety of seating clusters. Many individuals using the seating areas were both socializing and studying. The observers identified the engagement indicators in these seating areas; there were behaviors that demonstrated the Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, and Experience with Faculty. The behaviors observed were along the lines of learning strategies, reflective and integrative learning, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, and, although very limited, student-faculty interactions and, effective teaching practices in one on one situations.

The fourth engagement indicator, Campus Environment, was demonstrated through constant, quality interactions by staff of the union (professionals and student employees) and with visitors to the information desk. Additionally, a support environment existed where staff would regularly check in with one another.

Third floor. The third floor was a mix of meeting rooms, large programming spaces (i.e., ballroom and theater), a service area for room reservations, designated lounge spaces, outdoor patio areas, and access to the open, multi-floor atrium. There were roomy hallways along the ballroom and meeting rooms. Such spaces were butted with dramatic glass used as external walls of the Talley Student Union; entrances into office areas and the walls of meeting rooms were also glass. Again, the use of glass encouraged significant amounts of natural light and propagated the theme of see and be seen. In the lounge spaces and the open seating spaces, there were individual and small groups of students engaged in dialogue and group work. One observer did see a faculty member working with a group of students.

The behaviors that contribute to learning were the formal and informal gatherings between students for the purposes of studying. There also appeared greater opportunities for interactions with faculty and facilitators at structured programs and events in the ballrooms and theatre. Once again, the environment of the Talley fostered opportunities for connections and the building of campus

The furniture varied from tables and chairs for structured meetings, to more formal study-like activities, to soft furniture, to individual and groups of chairs. There were examples of chairs with arms, more modern looking furniture that was closer to the ground, and the use of school and non-school colors coupled with a diversity of tapestries that clothed the furniture. Sparse formal seating in the hallways directly adjacent to the ballrooms which seemed like a missed opportunity to provide some

singular seating. Furniture on the patios was frequently full of students during the observation times.

In interviews with students, faculty, and staff, each indicated the activities held in the meeting room, ballroom and theatre offered learning opportunities for those in attendance. A number of student affairs colleagues and culture center directors talked about programs that included speakers and panels following a presentation that engaged participants on the topics covered.

The design of the third floor was intentionally designed to support individuals moving through the Talley Student Union to points of destination (i.e., theatre, ballroom, meeting rooms, and lounge spaces). Many individuals were using the seating areas to both socialize and study. In respect to the Engagement Indicators, there were behaviors that demonstrated Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, and Experience with Faculty. The behavior observed were along the lines of learning strategies, reflective and integrative learning, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, student-faculty interactions, and limited effective teaching practices in one on one situations.

Fourth Floor. The fourth floor consisted of dedicated office space for student centered departments surrounded by a majority of glass walls along hallways for a greater visual access into all of the offices, reception areas, meetings rooms and some individual offices. Working individually and in groups, students were scattered throughout the floor in the ample lounge spaces, where a variety of furniture layouts existed. Many areas supplied white boards to spur collaborative engagement.

An immense sense of appreciation for dedicated lounge and meeting spaces emerged from interviews with the students and staff who occupied the fourth floor.

The behaviors that contribute to learning were found in the physical spaces supported by the student centered units on the floor. In addition, the enhanced lounge space provided opportunities for formal and informal learning with peers through discussion and problem solving. There also appeared greater opportunities for interactions with faculty and staff for students directly affiliated with the departments. The Talley Student Union offered enhanced opportunities for connections and the building of campus community through the adjacency of these units.

Alternatively, the same members expressed a feeling of disconnect in their involvement with the Talley—they felt more like “tenants” rather than partners with building staff. They also voiced some concern about policies (i.e., access to space after hours, costs associated with food and AV, and requirements to use in-house catering) and protocols (i.e., who is involved and the lack of transparency in decision-making, who can have white boards in their office spaces, and covering up some of the glass walls), but not enough that anyone indicated any desire to move out of their space.

An interview with a Talley staff member uncovered that the concept behind the variety of furniture types was “borrowed from the library” in the design phase of the re-imagined Talley Student Union. Using feedback after its re-opening, more tables and chairs have been added throughout the union.

A number of key observations on this floor included many display case-art work duos alongside walls, mostly near office spaces (i.e., Involvement Center, Multicultural Student Affairs, Student Government). Examples of student leadership included students working, individually or in groups, in large open spaces which may have been the reception/shared space in each respective office suite. At the time of observation, no faculty interaction was witnessed. It was challenging to see what each group was working on.

The deliberate design of the fourth floor hosts three diverse, major student center programmatic offices and the student government association. The tenants on this floor create multiple points of destination for the students, faculty, staff, and alumni not only to the Talley Student Union, but specifically to the fourth floor. There appeared to be many individuals using the seating areas for both socializing and studying.

In respect to the Engagement Indicators, there were behaviors that demonstrated Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, and Campus Environment. The behaviors observed were learning strategies, reflective and integrative learning, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, and quality of interactions by staff of the union (professionals and student employees). Individuals were consistently engaged with the dedicated physical offices and those around in the lounge spaces. Observations included detailing a supportive environment by staff regularly checking with each other and student staff.

Fifth Floor. The fifth floor was dedicated space for student-centered departments with high programmatic functions. Two of the centers are for marginalized populations (i.e., LGBT Center and Women’s Center) while the other two spaces were for fraternity and sorority life and the programming board. The glass walls along the hallways created greater visual access into all of the offices, reception areas, meetings rooms and some individual offices. Consistent throughout the Talley, lounge space and eclectic furniture pieces scattered the floor. The students permeated the floor individually and in groups in these spaces. Similar to the previous floor, scattered white boards offered collaborative engagement.

The behaviors that contribute to learning were found in the physical spaces supported by the student-centered units on the floor. The connections created in these spaces supported both diverse student populations that may be vulnerable at times and campus student leaders. Learning behaviors were also found in their discussions, interactions, and reflection.

Interviews with those on the fifth floor

revealed that while some felt their spaces were off the beaten path, there was still a sense of deep appreciation for having the space to use. Like the fourth floor, a disconnect between feeling like a tenant in the Talley rather than a partner with the Talley leadership emerged. Tenants in the space expressed concern on how policies and protocols were applied to their individual spaces. Examples related to how the individual offices wanted to decorate the space, what furniture was allowed as a point of discussion. The concerns were specific to the individual spaces and were not discussed in relation to how policies and protocols apply to apply beyond their own space. The tenants did not articulate how their space fits into the larger role of the student unions.

A number of key observations included the fairly quiet atmosphere during the day, less students stopping in to the spaces unless already connected to the space, and sleeping students in the centers where there was additional lounge furniture (i.e., couches and oversize chairs). Students were working, individually or in groups, in large open spaces which may have been the reception/shared space in each respective office suite. At the time of observation, no faculty interaction was witnessed. It was challenging to see what each group was working on.

An intentional focus on the fifth floor design paved space for four diverse and major student center programmatic offices. The tenants on this floor create multiple points of destination for the students, faculty, staff, and alumni not only to the Talley Student Union, but specifically to the fifth floor. There appeared to be many individuals using the seating areas to socialize, study, and relax.

In respect to the engagement Indicators, there were behaviors that demonstrated Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, and Campus Environment. The behaviors observed were learning strategies, reflective and integrative learning, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, and quality of interactions by staff of the union (professionals and student employees). The designated offices were consistently engaged with individuals in the dedicated physical offices and those around in the lounge spaces. Observations included detailing a supportive environment by staff regularly checking with each other and student staff.

Closing thoughts on the physical space

Many activities discussed in interviews were not physically observed during the site visit. Interviewees talked about peer mentoring, tutoring for course work, activism programming, and a sense of ownership in student led programs and services. The credit for these activities emerge from the work of student leaders and staff in the student-centered departments and student government located on the fourth floor and the centers and programming offices on the fifth floor. It also happened through the student employment program at the Talley Student Union. Student employees spoke intimately about personal responsibility, shared experiences, leadership, social responsibility and values.

As one student shared, “there’s always some type of program going on here, there’s always some type of activity.” While not everyone was in total agreement, there was some sense of pride when students and staff discussed the peaceful “Die in” demonstration in 2016 or the celebration with the mariachi band in the atrium. Interviewees confirmed the Talley Student Union as being a “one-stop shop” with many programs, services, and activities occurring. One student even referenced “Talley date nights” implying that there was always something to do especially if you were not of age to go to the bars off campus for a date.

The Talley Student Union and the Witherspoon Student Union were places people go to find a sense of campus community. Both unions fostered formal and informal communities by housing student-centered, programmatic offices and centers for students with various identities. The community surfaced from the interactions and connections between students at structured, planned events and unintentionally through their involvement and engagement. The variety of lounge spaces with furniture that supported ever-changing, interactive environments created inviting spaces that were flexible to the user. Integration of institutional artifacts, colors, and brands coinciding with the welcoming openness of the student unions’ environment affirmed a community situated on NC State’s campus.

Document Review

A document review prior to the site visit was conducted to allow the researchers time to learn more about the structure, services, programs and the student unions approach to learning prior to the site visit. Documents reviewed were clustered into the following categories:

Marketing Materials. The visual appeal of the marketing materials illustrated a care for the brand imaging of the student unions. The Talley Student Union facility emerged as the visual priority. Strategic initiatives were being taken to look at the Witherspoon Student Center aesthetics. The use of technology provided access for students to find information about the unions online. Video use illustrated students engaged in the environment working and participating in events to providing information to the community on how the space can be used. Additionally, information like the NC State Nutrition Guide focused on learning about health and wellness while highlighting the option of a personal resource for the students. A strong connection of linking theory to practice by creating opportunities for faculty to engage in the operation as a teaching laboratory were present.

Organizational & Fiscal Structure. The most salient document to the team in order to identify the role of learning and student success was the *NC State Student Centers Annual Report 2016-2017*. This document provided clear and concise information

about key programs and services associated with the Talley Student Union. The aesthetics of the report were also appealing—this document can be used throughout the campus to clearly articulate the Talley Student Union purpose and role on campus. A challenge for the site visit team was to understand how the data presented was combined and/or separated from the Witherspoon Student Center. The auxiliary service function of the unions was clearly articulated in the budget documents. The budget documents also indicated that the fiscal structure was focused on providing services to students rather than a primary location for conferences and community events. The self-operated bookstore and the connection to providing scholarships naturally lent support for the academic mission of the institution.

Historical. The history of the Talley Student Union is clearly articulated in the annual report. The text provided a clear sense of the role and purpose of the facility and how it was intended to serve the community. The history of the Witherspoon Student Center was not clearly articulated or able to be located in the documents reviewed. The conditions being created to evaluate the space were critical. The African American Cultural Center website articulated how the space within the Witherspoon Student Center is dedicated for students; the link to the larger role of the college union is not connected or articulated. The Military and Veteran Resource Center was also not easily accessible with relation to understanding how the center is connected to the Witherspoon Student Center beyond the fact that they occupy space. The ultimate question became: Is the Witherspoon Student Center a college union in the same philosophical way that the Talley Student Union is described?

Student Employment Program. The student employment program materials articulated the clearest connection to creating intentional student learning. The piece that was not present in the document review was how those learning outcomes were measured.

Assessment data was represented in the annual report as a snapshot of the premier programs and services. Union staff referenced the importance of satisfaction surveys to assess customer use within the facility. Those satisfaction results were referenced multiple times to indicate how the operation of the Talley is constantly improving to meet the demands of the campus community. Using the satisfaction survey results to improve practice contributed to the affordances of the environment. The missing link was how this contribution connects to improved conditions for student learning and success.

Social Media. Three social media sites were reviewed where Talley Student Union and Talley were a part of named searches and hashtags. Facebook was used infrequently among students and alumni. Many of the posts to @TalleyStudentUnion were from community partners or community groups that held events at the student center. Twenty-nine out of 30 people gave the Talley Student Union Facebook page its highest 5-star rating. The last official post to that address is dated April 7, 2014. By

contrast, the Talley Student Union's Facebook community page had 230 followers, 223 Likes and 6,449 total visits as of October 13, 2017. The most recent public post as of October 13 was September 11, 2017. There were approximately 112 mentions of Talley Student Union on Facebook between 2015 and October 13, 2017.

Used less frequently than Facebook was the Twitter account where the @NCStateUnion, #TalleyStudentUnion, and #TalleyTuesday hashtags were reviewed. Between September 2016 and September 2017, the majority of Twitter posts were made by Talley staff members, groups and the occasional alum. There was sporadic use of the Twitter hashtags in 2017 by current NC State students.

By contrast, the Talley Student Union Instagram account #talleystudentunion which first posted in October 2013, listed a total of 734 public posts as of October 13, 2017. Among all the posts, 128 were made in 2017. There was a vibrant use of Twitter among current NC State collegians. Students posted about many aspects of student life from concerts, outdoor games, graduation, and ice cream, to the Talley Student Union's interiors, dance and music performances, the bookstore, healthy dining #wellfedwolfpack, and even a picture of them with NC State's Mr. & Mrs. Wuf mascots.

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