



**THE EDUCATION
COLLABORATIVE**



Microlearning Series

Fostering Community Engagement in Higher Education while Working Remotely.

The Education Collaborative's Microlearning Series.

The Education Collaborative's microlearning series is a virtual learning series designed to share best practices in higher education in short learning units.

Using multimedia content, each guide in the series shares recommendations to implement insights tailored to different contexts.

The Purpose of this Guide

This guide highlights how the African Leadership University (ALU) Student Life teams on Mauritius and Rwanda campuses increased community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team saw higher student and staff community rates than when the ALU community was physically on campus.

At ALU, Building community is a significant factor to create an enabling environment for co-creators to solve African problems. Although ALU adopted the initiatives shared in this guide, they are relevant for institutions across Africa.

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The African Leadership University (ALU) Student Life team implemented strategies in three focus areas to encourage community engagement virtually.

These areas included:

1. Driving Cross-Campus Engagement among Students, Staff and Faculty.
2. Leveraging Student-Owned Outreaches to Boost Community Engagement.
3. Collaborating with Staff and Faculty to Support Students' Wellness.

In this guidebook, you will learn how to implement similar strategies at your institution.

Reflection: *The ALU Student Life team's mission and programming are based on the pillars of Support, Safety, Development and Culture. These pillars are the foundation of the initiatives in this guidebook.*

1. *Support: Providing multiple points of psychological, peer, immigration and academic support.*
2. *Safety: Creating safe spaces for psychological, emotional, social and physical wellbeing.*
3. *Development: Increasing the capacity for sustainable leadership development.*
4. *Culture: Harnessing diversity and values and celebrating them through inclusion.*

Driving Cross-Campus Engagement among Students, Staff and Faculty.

In your effort to increase engagement in virtual community-wide activities, it is essential to organize programs tailored to students, staff, and faculty. The community-wide programs discussed in this section are:

1. A virtual wellness week
2. A cross-campus community gathering
3. A training on diversity and inclusion

The virtual wellness week is specific to students, but you may include staff and faculty for maximum participation. The staff and faculty-specific initiatives discussed are wellness counselling for staff and faculty and wellness supervision sessions to check up on counsellors.

Reflection: While implementing these initiatives to drive cross-campus engagement, the ALU team's focus was allowing students, staff and faculty on the Rwanda and Mauritius campuses to engage with each other. If your institution works from one campus, focus on the university-wide community.



Community-Wide Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness

1. Cross-Campus Community Gathering

This is a 'campfire'-style event with games and performances you can organize for the university community across campuses. To organize this gathering:

- You can use Zoom Video Conferencing or Youtube to allow live streaming and engagement through the chat feature.
- Pre-record speeches and performances to minimize disruptions, including poor internet connection from role players during the event.
- Engage students to learn about games that can be played to increase engagement. Mentimeter is a helpful tool for playing games during the event.
- At the end of the event, ask the community for feedback on what could be improved. Slido is a helpful tool for conducting surveys or polls at the end of the event.

2. Diversity And Inclusion Training

This training session is a university-wide conversation on diversity and inclusion. The Student-life team listens to recommendations on improving inclusion and building a safe community in these training sessions. When organizing a similar session, consider:

- Choosing a trusted resource person to handle the training session.
- Designing the program to be a brainstorming session where you receive feedback on how the Student Life team can improve inclusion and build a safe environment for each community member.
- Organizing sessions via video conferencing platforms like Zoom to allow interactions during sessions.

Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness for Staff and Faculty

1. Cross-Campus Wellness Counselling For Staff and Faculty

Catering for the mental health of staff and faculty is essential to keep the broader community mentally healthy. To organize counselling sessions for staff, consider:

- Making different time slots available for staff and faculty to book via applications like Calendly
- Allowing staff and faculty to schedule sessions and choose their preferred communication medium for confidentiality reasons. Your team can use platforms such as Google meets or hangouts for the calls.
- Scheduling at least one follow up conversation after the initial discussion with staff and faculty who scheduled sessions.

2. Cross-Campus Wellness Supervisions

To cater to counsellors' psychological needs, schedule calls across campus Student Life teams to support and share experiences on challenging workstreams. To set up a cross-campus wellness supervision program:

- Pair up counsellors and task them to organize one-on-one sessions twice a month, monthly or quarterly, depending on the frequency that works for your teams.
- Organize a feedback session across student life teams depending on the frequency of the one-on-one sessions. The feedback session will help evaluate what could be improved or measured if there's no longer a need for the program.
- Use the feedback sessions as an opportunity to share valuable tips for counsellors on the job.

Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness for Students

1. Virtual Wellness Week

Your team can dedicate a week to focus on student wellness. To organize a virtual wellness week, consider:

- Training student peer counsellors to increase your capacity as a department. Allow them to plan and lead activities during the week.
- Designing your program to focus on dimensions of wellness, including physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health.
- Holding sessions on video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. Social media like Instagram is also a helpful platform for engaging students in conversation.



Reflection: The ALU Student life team ended the virtual wellness week with a music jam on Instagram. You may consider ending the wellness week on a light note to engage students. To encourage community engagement, your team may also include staff and faculty in the activities for the week.

Community-Wide Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness

1. Cross-Campus Community Gathering
2. Diversity and Inclusion Training

Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness for Staff and Faculty

1. Cross-Campus Wellness Counselling for Staff and Faculty
2. Cross-Campus Wellness Supervisions

Programs to Improve Cross-Campus Wellness for Students

1. Virtual Wellness Week

Leveraging Student-Owned Outreaches to Boost Community Engagement.

Training student peer counsellors to lead wellness programs is an effective way to boost students' engagement in activities. Student-led initiatives are often better-patronized by their colleagues. In this chapter, three ways to ensure student-ownership of programs are outlined.

These three include:

1. Organizing a webinar series
2. Launching a social media outreach
3. Empowering student peer counsellors

Using social media as a critical tool to drive these initiatives, your team can strengthen the spirit of community at your institution.



Reflection: A primary value at ALU is ownership. As the engagement in academic and non-academic activities dwindled at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Student Life team had to get students' buy-in into all scheduled activities. The team used it as an opportunity to put the ALU value of ownership to work.

1. Webinar Series

Students will engage in activities that serve their needs. It is helpful to take note of prevalent challenges faced by students during counselling sessions. Knowing these challenges help determine the kind of topics to discuss in your webinar series. To organize these webinars, consider:

- Creating a list of prevalent challenges students face
Suppose there's no already-existing database to determine these challenges. In that case, your team can put a list of topics together, run a poll and ask students which topics are most relevant to them. Slido or other tools for surveys and polls are useful for running the polls.
- Determining the appropriate speaker or facilitator for the topic and sending them the required event details.
- Engaging student peer counsellors in designing the webinars to ensure maximum engagement from students.

2. Student Social Media Outreach

Your team can leverage social media to engage students virtually. It can serve as an informal space to keep students connected with the rest of the community. To organize a social media outreach:

- If your team is not familiar with the best social media management and content curation practices, contact your institution's communication team. Alternatively, consider hiring a student intern or volunteer to assist.
- Use your compiled list of student challenges to determine the kind of content to share. You and your team can use videos, pictures and other graphics to share the content.
- Create opportunities for students to interact with each other. The Instagram live feature can help your team achieve this.

3. Peer Counsellors' Outreach

To build your team's capacity and increase the effectiveness of your outreach to students, you must empower student peer counsellors. Consider the following when organizing a peer counsellor's outreach:

- Train student peer counsellors based on your needs as a department. You may assign one student counsellor to reach out to 50 students each month of your outreach. Deciding on the ratio will help determine the number of counsellors to train.
- Guide student peer counsellors to reach out to students via the desired mode of communication.
- As part of the outreach, prepare questions to evaluate the well being of each student. Ask student peer counsellors to use those questions to assess how students are doing.
- Reach out to all students who need attention and counselling.

Recap

Student-Owned Outreaches to Boost Community Engagement.

1. Webinar Series
2. Student Social Media Outreach
3. Peer Counsellors' Outreach

Collaborating with Staff and Faculty to Support Students' Wellness.

In fostering community relations and a one-team mindset, your team must collaborate with other stakeholders and departments in the university. Faculty, for example, interacts with students often. They must be involved in your team's community engagement strategy for maximum results. In this chapter, three initiatives to foster collaboration with faculty are discussed.

These three include:

1. Training faculty in student wellness
2. Leveraging learning management systems (LMS)
3. Including faculty & staff in university-wide conversations.



1. Faculty Training in Student Wellness

Students typically spend more time with faculty than other stakeholders. Leverage your faculty's contact with students by training them to support students' wellness. Consider these when designing your training program:

- Decide on how often you will organize training sessions.
- Training sessions held should be supported with periodic refresher emails sharing tools and summaries of lessons shared in training sessions.
- Share tools that help faculty recognize and refer students that need extra support, in-person or virtually.
- Train faculty to have 'first responder' coaching conversations. After identifying students who need help, 'first responder' coaching conversations start the student's recovery journey.

2. Learning Management Systems (LMS) Usage

Learning management systems like Canvas and Camu can serve as a repository for content from the programs organized by the team. To leverage your institution's LMS:

- Discuss with faculty or the academic team how feasible it would be for your team to upload content to the university's LMS.
- Collate relevant content and insights shared in programs and upload unto the LMS.
- Where necessary, develop additional content to be uploaded on the LMS. Involving student leaders is a great way to get the help required to curate content.

3. Faculty & Staff in University-Wide Conversations

Involve faculty and staff in globally relevant conversations outside the classroom that influence the culture and values of your institution. When hosting university-wide talks that involve faculty, consider:

- Choosing the right video conferencing platform or social media for your team.
- Featuring topics and conversations of interest to the larger community. Using a poll to determine areas of interest in the community.
- Running feedback polls at the end of sessions to improve feature programs.

Reflection: *To involve staff and faculty in globally relevant conversations, the ALU Student life team organized a campaign on healthy masculinity. The series of conversations helped faculty and staff to feel connected to the broader community.*

How to Collaborate with Staff and Faculty to Support Students' Wellness.

1. Faculty Training in Student Wellness
2. Learning Management Systems (LMS) Usage
3. Faculty & Staff in University-Wide Conversations

Sustaining Community Engagement Initiatives

After implementing initiatives through cross-campus engagement, student-owned outreaches, and collaboration with staff and faculty, your team must maintain your community engagement levels.

Conduct periodic reviews of initiatives to evaluate what is working and what's not working. To continuously strengthen community engagement virtually, the values of collaboration and student ownership of their university experience should be at the heart of your team's strategy.



About the Authors



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Osaretin Osadolor is a developmental psychologist currently helping students build wellness systems at African Leadership University in Mauritius.

With over a decade of experience connecting with people, Osaretin has worked in telecommunications, healthcare management and education. In all of these domains, empathic bonds have connected people with resources or influenced resourceful communities.

Her team in Mauritius is managed by Jeremy Ruiters, a seasoned counselling therapist and strategic systems builder, with whom she is reimagining the Wellness and Support structures of ALU to a continental and global reach.

It sure helps that the Student Life team is making magic from a tropical island.



JEREMY RUITERS



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