

Building Community Connections

Adaptable Innovations
from 100 Campuses



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The Connection Point Program at Middle Tennessee State U.

In a Nutshell:

First-year students at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) are told the institutional value of connections from the get-go: “At MTSU, getting involved with cocurricular activities is not simply something we recommend to new students as a good idea,” writes assistant vice president for student affairs Dr. Danny Kelley in discussing the Connection Point program. “Getting involved is an expectation of everyone who claims to be True Blue—it’s an important part of the True Blue Pledge!”

The True Blue Pledge states, among other things, “I am engaged in the life of this community. I am a giver and a recipient.”

What’s Offered:

The Center for Student Involvement and Leadership (CSIL) facilitates Connection Point, touted by Kelley as “an important part of your first-year experience.” It offers events throughout the year that give students an opportunity to connect and get involved with the life of the institution.

Each incoming freshman is expected to participate in at least four Connection Point activities during the first part of the fall semester, although they’re encouraged to attend even more, if they like. Kelley suggests that Convocation in August be their first involvement.

Events include things such as:

- **Color the Commons** – chalking the campus during Sexual Assault Awareness Month with words of empowerment
- **The Game of Life** – financial literacy simulation game
- **Athletic events**
- **MT After Dark Night at the Movies** – watching recent movies at an off-campus theater by scanning their myMT Event Pass

“Connection Point events are designed to get our newest students (entering Freshmen) acclimated to college life by providing a wide array of events to get you connected to MTSU! The schedule of events is designed just for you; however, they are open to all students! Events range from a variety of fairs, competitions, educational events, outdoor movies, comedians, musical events, and events purely designed to help you create new friendships.”

Other Notes:

Connection Point buttons are offered at each event so students can collect them.

Learn more at: <https://w1.mtsu.edu/campuslife/what-is-cp.php>

Sources: Campus Life Events Listing and “What is Connection Point?” Letter, Middle Tennessee State University

Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging at Stony Brook U. Through Student-Commissioned Art

In a Nutshell:

The Campus Beautification Committee (CBC) at Stony Brook University (NY) works to incorporate more beauty into the institution's surroundings through student-commissioned art. A primary goal, according to the university magazine, is "to create a physical environment that matches the campus's energy and vitality." This community effort involves students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors and visitors creating a lasting legacy.

What's Offered:

The broad-based CBC initiative is designed to:

- Reflect joy
- Create spaces for artistic expression
- Instill a sense of belonging, pride and purpose.

"I looked around and wanted to facilitate something that was really on people's minds already: beautifying the space all around us, so the campus itself reflects the special community we have here at Stony Brook University," Mitchell Trinka, the CBC's founder and chair, and digital media manager for Advancement, told the magazine. He works with 15 committee members from across the institution on this effort.

Projects thus far have included:

- A colorful tree/bird "Spread Your Wings" mural on the wall adjoining the LGBTQ* Center and West Side Dining
- Displaying award-winning Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities student artwork in the library
- Creating environmental images at the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences
- Community origami projects in collaboration with the campus Origami Club

"When Mitch [founder and chair of the CBC] came to me with the idea, it was immediately clear we had the same goals – working toward having every point of entry, every hallway, office or pathway tell our story; exemplify our values of inclusivity and belonging; connect students, employees, alumni, community members and visitors to each other and to the campus; and make this a place where people want to work, go to school and collaborate."

– Judi Brown Clarke, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, Chief Diversity Officer and Member of the Campus Beautification Committee

Creating a Sense of Place and Belonging at Stony Brook U. Through Student-Commissioned Art

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Other Notes:

The CBC works with construction painters for their expertise, borrows supplies from Facilities and collaborates with the university's art community to make the projects come to life. Students whose art is commissioned receive credit for their artwork, plus they're provided with ongoing guidance, support and supplies.

"From our committee to art students and professors, people across campus have been buying in because they see this is much more than a couple of murals being painted on the walls," Trinkka said. "It's really a movement toward family and community here at Stony Brook."

Learn more at: <https://mag.stonybrook.edu/sbutiful/>

Sources: Stony Brook University News, 3/19/24; *Stony Brook University Magazine*

Light the Campus at Case Western Remembers Those Who are Gone

In a Nutshell:

Shared grief is a connection point for many on campus looking for a purposeful place to make meaning of their sorrow. At Case Western Reserve University (OH), the campus community annually celebrates a day of remembrance called Light the Campus that strives to do just that.

What's Offered:

Students, faculty and staff members can submit names of community members or loved ones who have recently passed away. These names are then read during the February Day of Remembrance ceremony.

Campus trees are lit as part of the ceremony. Then, battery-powered candles are distributed for campus community members to display in their offices, rooms or homes throughout the month of March.

Other Notes:

The program is part of the University Health and Counseling Services' Wellness efforts. The live event is held outside with a nearby rain location. Student volunteers help make the event run by reading names during the ceremony, lighting the lights and distributing candles.

Learn more at: <https://case.edu/studentlife/healthcounseling/student-wellnesswellness-programs/light-campus>

Source: Light the Campus, University Health and Counseling Services, Division of Student Affairs, Case Western Reserve University

Montclair State's 'Friends Day' Invites Community to Campus Rec Center

In a Nutshell:

Campus recreation programs looking to increase inclusiveness through programming and community service may consider implementing a Friends Day. Montclair State University (NJ) has been sponsoring such an event annually since 2008. It's focused on inviting young people with physical and intellectual disabilities ages 5 to 21 to explore the Student Recreation Center during a day of fun, themed programming.

What's Offered:

The student-led RecBoard hosts the event, filling Friends Day with activities such as swimming, arts and crafts, games, basketball, dance parties and more. Sessions last for two hours. Two college student "buddies" are trained and then paired up with each participant to accompany them throughout their time at the rec center and make sure they have the best day ever.

In 2023, the theme of Friends Day was Mario Brothers. Past themes have included Harry Potter, Marvel, Winter Wonderland, Legos, Toy Story, Candyland, Dr. Seuss, One in a Minion and more.

Youth involved with Friends Day must be registered and abide by the following:

- All must be 5 to 21 years old
- All must be able to use the restroom on their own (no diapers)
- Parents and/or guardians may not stay during the event, except in extenuating circumstances

Romayne Eaker-Kelly, the director of Campus Recreation at Montclair State University, has overseen every Friends Days hosted there. "It is a treasured event," Eaker-Kelly told *Campus Rec* magazine. "Student leaders over the years from within our department believe it's the best and most rewarding event we offer our student body. Campus partners look forward to the day and find joy in knowing it's a day for children and their families to be loved and cared for with a lot of fun for all participants."

"Friends Day was an event I spearheaded ... It didn't take long for it to become a passion project. My main takeaway is I got to be a part of something bigger than myself."

– Maurice Jenkins, Student Building Manager for Campus Recreation, Chair for Community Service on the RecBoard

Other Notes:

Campus Rec offers several recommendations for sponsoring a successful "Friends Day," including working with reputable organizations, making sure the legal and risk management bases are covered, planning in advance, staying organized, creating a theme, casting a wide net, doing "buddy" training and ending the day by inviting family members to participate.

Learn more at: www.montclair.edu/campus-recreation/recboard/friends-day/

Sources: Friends Day 2023, Campus Recreation, Montclair State University; *Campus Rec* magazine, 6/19/23

Brown U. Comfort Dog Builds Connections Between Campus Community and Public Safety

In a Nutshell:

Elvy is a three-year-old comfort dog who creates community wherever she goes on the Brown University (RI) campus. The Labrador retriever and her handler, University Police Officer Dustin Coleman, build connections while serving as ambassadors for the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and providing a welcoming, calming presence for campus community members.

What's Offered:

"She helps us start conversations with students and staff that aren't typically conversations you have with a police officer, about daily life and fun things," Coleman told News at Brown. "I think people are more comfortable having genuine conversations with us, which helps when we show up to a call or a concern."

Besides patrolling campus with Coleman, Elvy participates in New Student Orientation activities, athletic pep rallies and even has her own community engagement Instagram account.

She isn't an incident response dog, according to DPS, yet they're hopeful she can help augment the support provided to individuals experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety. "I can respond with her to mental health calls," Coleman explained. "I can get her to lay down with people, cuddle people and help relax the mood."

Elvy breaks down barriers while also adding to people's sense of well-being. "She's trained to be present and friendly and to be petted," DPS Chief Rodney Chatman said. "There is also science behind this and evidence that the presence of comfort dogs reduces blood pressure, lowers anxiety and elevates moods."

Other Notes:

Elvy was trained in socialization skills through the Puppies Behind Bars program at the Otisville and Fishkill prisons in New York. She learned commands and spent weekends in New York City acclimating to noise, crowds, elevators and public transportation, reported News from Brown, in readying for her campus job.

Sources: News from Brown, 9/9/22 and 1/11/24

"It's really opened up doors and relationships this year. I'm being invited to places. I get a better idea of what's going on out there, and people feel comfortable sharing information with me. I've never worked with the campus community as much as I do now."

– Brown University Police Officer
Dustin Coleman, Elvy's Handler

Brown U. Comfort Dog Builds Connections Between Campus Community and Public Safety

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Growing Community Engagement Programs, One Dog at a Time

An annual Cops and Comfort Dogs Symposium is held for dogs and handlers from across New England and beyond, reported News from Brown. That includes Harvard University Police Department Officer Steven Fumicello and Sasha, the institution's first community engagement dog.

Law enforcement agencies exploring comfort dog programs also get to learn more about the possible ways dogs can help work with school children, veterans, people with mental health concerns, students and more.

And then, as was the case with the Symposium held at Brown in 2023, the community is invited to an afternoon event where all the dogs in attendance get to play and commune with their public.

Source: News from Brown, 7/29/23