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State of State

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Note: Remember to slow down! Take your time, it helps both you and the audience.

Purpose: To inform the audience about how to better engage students across campus who might otherwise seem disinterested.

I. Imagine it's the first day of class. You sit next to someone with a sticker on their laptop for a club you've never heard of.

A. You think, "That sounds cool!" but before you can ask them about it, class starts, and by the time it ends, you've already forgotten.

1. Later in the week, you attend the Involvement Fair. Suddenly, there are 500 student organizations clamoring for your attention.
2. You take brochures, scan QR codes, sign up for email lists. But when the next week hits:
 - i. filled with homework,
 - ii. quizzes,
 - iii. and work shifts,
3. you never attend a single meeting.

B. This experience is not unique.

1. Penn State boasts over 1,000 student organizations, yet many students struggle to engage.
2. Some don't know where to start, others feel like they don't belong, and some simply don't have the time.
3. If engagement is such an integral part of student life, why is it so difficult to achieve?

C. Today, I want to talk about three things:

1. Breaking barriers; understanding the obstacles that keep students from engaging.
2. Building bridges; how personal connections encourage involvement.
3. Creating value; how engagement benefits both individuals and the broader Penn State community.

II. First, breaking barriers: why do students disengage?

A. Before we discuss solutions, we must understand the barriers to engagement.

1. Time Constraints - The average student juggles coursework, part-time jobs, and personal responsibilities.
2. Information Overload - With so many clubs and events, students often feel overwhelmed rather than encouraged.
3. Social & Cultural Barriers - First-generation students, commuters, and international students often feel isolated.
4. Financial Barriers - Hidden costs, like membership fees, travel, or conference expenses, deter participation.

B. How can we address these barriers?

1. Streamline communication about opportunities:
 - i. Right now, student organizations advertise through multiple platforms-Instagram, GroupMe, Discord, email.
 - ii. A centralized hub, like Penn State Engage, should be better integrated into Canvas, LionPATH, and student emails.
2. Integrate engagement into academics:
 - i. The IEEE student chapter connects coursework with practical projects.
 - ii. THON committees allow students to develop leadership skills alongside their studies.

3. Normalize small steps:

- i. Students shouldn't feel pressure to take leadership roles immediately.
- ii. Attending one meeting or volunteering once should be celebrated.

C. Think of someone you know who isn't involved. What's holding them back?

Understanding this is the first step to change.

III. Second, building bridges: or, the power of connection.

A. Large-scale recruitment efforts like involvement fairs are important, but personal invitations are far more effective.

1. Studies show students are more likely to engage when personally invited by a friend or mentor.
2. Involvement is not just about finding an organization-it's about finding a community.

B. I experienced this firsthand.

1. I joined the Association of Residence Hall Students because my friends encouraged me.
2. It was summer session of freshman year, I knew no one else, and these seniors mentioned how I can join a club where I make a positive impact and I get free dinner.
2. Without their push, I might never have taken that first step- and to date, those seniors are still some of my best friends.

C. Mentorship can bridge the gap.

1. Many colleges have peer mentorship programs, but what if every club had one?
2. What if we created campus-wide cultural exchange nights, where different student organizations collaborate?

- D. A challenge for you: invite someone new to your next club meeting. A simple invitation can be the bridge they need.

IV. Finally, creating value: or, why engagement matters.

- A. Engagement isn't just about fun-it shapes who we become.

- 1. It builds leadership, communication, and organizational skills.
- 2. It fosters a culture of innovation, inclusivity, and resilience.

- B. The ripple effect of engagement.

- 1. Engaged students contribute more to their communities.
- 2. And their communities benefit them more as well.
- 3. This relationship between student and community leads to a better experience for everyone, and encourages more new members.
- 4. For example, my work in ARHS led to real change:
 - i. like reintroducing mobile ordering in dining halls, at a time when it was deemed too complicated and not useful.
 - ii. or by decreasing prices in the EDGE cafes, helping students start their morning for a little less.
 - iii. the impact of an engaged community is real- and not just a fantasy.

V. Engagement isn't just an opportunity-it's a responsibility.

- A. So what can you do?

- B. Here's my challenge for you:

- 1. Attend one new event this semester.
- 2. Bring a friend to your next club meeting.
- 3. Help a peer find an opportunity they didn't know existed.

C. And a challenge to Penn State. Institutions must cultivate engagement, not just expect it:

1. Incorporate engagement pathways into advising-academic advisors should discuss involvement as part of student success.
2. Embed engagement into First-Year Seminar courses so that students start their journey with involvement.
3. Amplify outreach efforts with well-promoted engagement platforms accessible to all students.

D. Together, we can make Penn State a more engaged, inclusive, and thriving community.

E. **Thank you.** Are there any questions?