

TITAN CREW ACTION TEAM REPORT

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Executive Summary

Surveys answered by 439 students and 42 faculty revealed overwhelming majorities of students (85%) and faculty (97%) support ending the Titan Crew program. Majorities of students believe the goals of the program are being met with minimal contribution from the program itself – fewer than 25% of students attribute their relationships with teachers or each other to Titan Crew. In survey comments, students strongly indicated that Titan Crew is redundant with residential programming. The program contributes to the stress of a plurality (~40%) of students and a large majority (80%) of faculty. Faculty responses suggest Titan Crew may be hindering faculty recruitment and retention efforts.

It is the unanimous recommendation of the Titan Crew Action Team that IMSA retire the Titan Crew program.

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SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) conducted surveys of Titan Crew on four occasions: September 4, 2020 (342 responses); November 18, 2020 (403 responses); May 20, 2021 (392 responses); and September 17, 2021 (449 responses). Student satisfaction with the program in these surveys was around 50%. Since the OIR has already presented the results of their surveys to the Principal's Office, we do not repeat them here. However, we noted several points that the surveys did not cover fully:

- At no point were the faculty surveyed, so their perspective on the program was missing.
- All student surveys were given during remote learning with the exception of the last, which was at the very beginning of our return to campus. We had anecdotal evidence that students' perception of Titan Crew changed with the return to in-person learning.
- Survey questions focused on the students' relationship to their facilitators but not to the program as a whole, which left room for students who liked their facilitators but did not enjoy the program.
- Open-ended responses on the survey contained some strongly worded, sometimes vitriolic complaints about the program that didn't seem adequately reflected in the questions that were asked.

To address the lack of data, we conducted a survey of faculty on November 17, 2021. We received 42 responses. In addition to the questions covered in this document, the survey also asked for questions faculty would like to ask students in the Titan Crew program, and based on that feedback, we conducted another survey of students through Titan Crew sections on December 10, 2021. The student survey received 439 responses.

STRESS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Large majorities of students (76%) and faculty (95%) feel that Titan Crew is not an efficient use of student time. A significant majority of students (77%) feel that it actually detracts from productive work time. This was evidenced in survey comments, as well:

- “My facilitator has been really kind and it really has nothing to do with her or my group but I count on the time to work. It would really help to have that time back.” [student]
- “connecting students with teachers and other students, comes naturally in person, so it [Titan Crew] feels like a waste of time and stressor for students instead.” [student]
- “titan crew has truly been the most unnecessary [sic] thing so far of this school year. Forcibly playing poker with students of all grades instead of doing the homework that actually needs to be done, having time taken away from midday to eat, sleep, do homework, have club meetings, hangout with friends, I'm not sure this is the best way to "connect students to faculty"” [student]
- “Titan crew takes up time during my midday where I can meet with teachers or practice my violin, and do other things. I find attending Titan crew to be a burden on my schedule.” [student]
- “They [students] all just seem exasperated by having to be there. I often get requests for them to skip out because they need to meet with a teacher or finish up an essay due later that day. And I totally understand that; I've had to stop helping students a few times this semester so that I could go to Titan Crew instead. [faculty]
- “I've had to turn kids away for setting appointments with me multiple times because of Titan Crew.” [faculty]
- “I honestly feel that it is just a waste of time, especially when I have tests to be studying for instead or have assignments/group work to do. I love my teacher. She is very kind, but I like to study during Midday and do school work, and being stuck in a class doing nothing that is really important just feels very unproductive.” [student]

Perhaps the most disturbing finding in this section is that more than one in three students and more than four in five faculty *characterize Titan Crew as a source of stress*. In an environment that is already often extremely stressful for students, teachers, and administrators, and made more so by the continuing challenges of the pandemic, this finding should give the institution serious pause. We believe the strain this program puts on students and faculty outweighs its minimal benefits.

Titan Crew is a productive use of student time.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	40.5%	35.5%	18.9%	3.0%	1.8%	4.8%	76.0%
Faculty	62.8%	32.6%	4.7%	0	0	0	95.4%

Titan Crew is a source of stress for me.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	7.3%	23.7%	30.1%	26.7%	12.3%	39.0%	31.0%
Faculty	4.8%	4.8%	9.5%	35.7%	45.2%	80.9%	9.6%

Titan Crew takes away from productive work time for me.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	3.6%	5.0%	14.4%	35.3%	41.7%	77.0%	8.6%

Titan Crew is a productive use of faculty time.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Faculty	69.0%	26.2%	4.8%	0	0	0	95.2%

TITAN CREW PROGRAM GOALS

Our most overwhelming finding is that nearly all the participants in the Titan Crew program – 85% of students and 97% of faculty – want it to end. We believe the strength of these numbers demonstrates that no revision to the program will lead to a positive outcome. Interestingly, the data suggest that the goals of Titan Crew will continue to be met even without the program itself; for example, over half the students agree that a faculty member cares about them and knows their plans for the future, and 79% of students agree that a faculty member knows them, *but only 19-22% of students attribute this to the Titan Crew program*. This is consistent with the 18% of students who agree that the program is helping them make connections across grade levels, versus 60% who disagree. In other words, the students are connecting with faculty and each other without Titan Crew.

Only 15% of students and 5% of faculty think the Titan Crew program is necessary now that we have transitioned from remote to in-person learning, a sentiment heavily reflected in the survey comments:

- “Titan Crew was a good idea last year, while we were still online, and there was no way for students to organically interact with teachers. This year, however, it is redundant and a waste of everyone's time. Students already get a chance to talk to their teachers, and there is no reason to force them to do so” [student]
- “It was a good effort, and maybe important a year ago, but we have moved on. There no longer is a need for the program.” [student]
- “I have not connected with other peers from other classes through this. I've met more underclassmen and peers through activities outside of Titan Crew.” [student]
- “I thought it was a good idea during quarantine but I don't think it is useful in person.” [student]
- “Titan Crew was worth a shot during remote learning, when contact with students was so sparse and we were willing to try anything to get students better connected. Now that we are back in person, it rapidly became clear to both students and faculty how redundant it is with Student Life programming.” [faculty]
- “This program made sense when we were doing virtual learning. But now that we're on campus, it feels like "going through the motions" for both students (from what I'm hearing from them) and faculty. Students need that free time to relax, do work, OR meet with faculty!” [faculty]
- “It’s a waste of students and teachers time now that we’re on campus.” [student]

If you had to choose, would you continue the Titan Crew program?

	Yes	No
Students	15.1%	84.9%
Faculty	2.4%	97.6%

Titan Crew serves its intended purpose now that students are back on campus with their peers.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	31.7%	22.8%	30.3%	13.4%	1.8%	15.2%	54.5%
Faculty	44.2%	30.2%	19/0%	4.7%	n/a	4.7%	74.4%

At least one member of the faculty knows and cares about me.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	2.1%	3.9%	15.7%	54.0%	24.4%	78.8%	6.0%

Titan Crew is the reason at least one member of the faculty knows and cares about me.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	30.3%	27.0%	20.7%	17.3%	4.3%	21.6%	57.3%

A faculty member knows my aspirations for life after high school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	6.4%	15.9%	22.3%	38.3%	16.9%	55.2%	22.3%

Titan Crew is the reason a faculty member knows my aspirations for life after high school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	34.9%	27.1%	19.6%	14.4%	4.1%	18.5%	62.0%

Titan Crew helps me feel connections with students across grade levels.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Students	35.8%	24.1%	21.9%	14.1%	4.1%	18.2%	59.9%

IMSA 2021-2022 PRIORITIES

For a faculty body that historically can seldom find agreement on anything, the alignment of numbers here is startling – more than 75% of faculty don't think the Titan Crew program helps IMSA create a diverse, inclusive community, and almost 90% don't think it contributes to their personal well-being. Two-thirds of faculty don't think Titan Crew provides the same experience equitably for all students. Faculty survey comments corroborate these data:

- “I am not equipped to have socio-emotional lessons with the students. And I am frustrated that we were twice promised a "ready to go" curriculum that has not materialized. The students already have several other required activities to get to know each other.”
- “I appreciate the spirit motivating Titan Crew's creation, but as time goes on, it feels increasingly as if it is a program in search of a purpose. If the idea is that students need positive connections with adults, there are many spaces where this likely is already happening (residence life, extracurriculars, SIR, classes, community events).”
- “It might be a valuable program if we had the curriculum from the counselors that we were promised, or other curriculum about SEL, time-management, and self-management skills. If we were delivering curriculum, however, we should get extra compensation for having an extra class.”
- “There is no curriculum at all so it is reliant on the teachers coming up with things each week and we don't have time for that on top of our regular crazy workload.”
- “I am quite unprepared for this activity - a Ph.D. was not much help for dealing with a dozen randomly chosen students and trying to entertain them somehow for an hour per week. Nor was this in my job description, nor is it part of a good teacher's skill set. [...] The overall effect is a time that puts stress on the teachers and students by requiring to give up an hour per week of precious time with no clear result. Both this year and last, I found myself dreading Titan Crew even as I looked forward to my classes.”

One of IMSA's 2021-22 priorities is well-being (defined on Community Day as “academic, socio-emotional, mental, and physical health”). Does the Titan Crew program contribute to your well-being?

	Yes	No Opinion	No
Faculty	2.4%	9.5%	88.1%

One of IMSA's 2021-22 priorities is equity and excellence. In your opinion, does the Titan Crew program contribute to IMSA “creating a diverse, inclusive community of global citizens who can realize their full potential, and execute our mission to advance the human condition”?

	Yes	No Opinion	No
Faculty	4.8%	19.0%	76.2%

Titan Crew provides the same experience equitably for all students.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree/Strongly	Disagree/Strongly
Faculty	38.1%	28.6%	21.4%	9.5%	2.4%	11.9%	66.7%

FACULTY RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

With 60% of current faculty reporting they would be *less* likely to take a job at an institution that has a program like Titan Crew over one that doesn't, it is worth considering that the program may be a drag on efforts to recruit and retain teachers – efforts with which the institution has struggled in recent years (and which another action team is researching). National reports indicate that teachers are leaving the field in record numbers because of the pandemic and other factors, and there seems to be ample evidence that fewer people are entering the field of teaching, meaning that IMSA will be drawing from a shrinking pool of candidates in future years. With IMSA teacher salaries lagging behind some local institutions, especially in the last several years, IMSA is likely already behind in a competitive teacher recruitment market. Though it may be tempting to dismiss as minimal the negative impact of a program like Titan Crew on recruitment efforts, its effect should not be overlooked entirely.

If you were on the market for a teaching job and received similar offers from two similar schools, with the only notable difference being that one school had a program similar to Titan Crew and one did not, how would that impact your decision?

	Much more likely NO TC	Slightly more likely NO TC	No Effect	Slightly more likely TC	Much more likely at TC	More likely TC	More likely NOT TC
Faculty	23.8%	35.7%	38.1%	0	2.4%	2.4%	59.5%

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

It is the unanimous finding of the Titan Crew Action Team that the Titan Crew program should be retired. We say this despite our strong belief in and affirmation of the goals of the Titan Crew program, namely that:

1. Each student should have a faculty member who knows and cares about them.
2. Each student should have a faculty member who knows their plans for the future.
3. Students should make connections across grade levels.

The data, however, indicate that the program itself contributes minimally to accomplishing these goals, and may in some cases – for example, teachers reporting they’ve had to stop helping students and cancel student appointments to oversee Titan Crew – be working at cross purposes with them. We believe the harms of the program outweigh its benefits.

In that Titan Crew inflicts stress on a greater percentage of students (39%) than see the program accomplishing its goals (18-22%), in that it causes stress to a large majority of faculty (80%), and in that there is an almost-universal desire among participants (85% of students and 97% of faculty) for the program to end, we must recommend the program’s expiration. The deep disapproval from all participants and the fact that only 15% of the students and 5% of faculty think the program has a purpose now that they are back on campus make this one of the clearest next steps we have seen in a century or so of combined experience in education.

Comments from students on the unpopularity of the program are myriad and wide-ranging. They vary in tone from apathetic (“Titan Crew is fine but I don’t oppose the idea of removing it.”) to evaluative (it “doesn’t work”; “it doesn’t benefit me in any way and just takes up time”) to generous (“Titan Crew was good in theory but wastes everyone’s time in practice”; “Titan crew is great and all but I’d rather have that time to study or do homework”) to hostile (it “almost seems useless”; “it sucks”).

Faculty comments also reveal a profound frustration with the program. One commonly expressed sentiment called it “a waste of time for all involved.” Perhaps more disturbing to the institution were the comments registering institutional hopelessness – the idea that faculty and student concerns were being ignored. “I’m tired of talking about Titan Crew,” wrote one faculty member. “It doesn’t matter what I think. It doesn’t matter what you ask students on a survey.” Another wrote “I would say a lot of negative things about TC but I really do not want to waste any more time on TC than I already have.” Another commenter noted that the Titan Crew program was “assembled without faculty input, administered without faculty feedback, [and] renewed without faculty endorsement.” We feel that comments like these reveal the schism that has deepened between faculty and administrators; we further believe that retiring this unpopular program may be one small way to start to repair this divide.

Many students spoke to the inefficacy of the program in their survey comments. One wrote that, “I hold great appreciation for staff members that care about mental-health and school administrations that make efforts to connect with students on a personal level. However, I have

never been a part of a program that has been so undeniably futile and counterproductive until I had to attend titan crew.” Others also noted that the socialization felt forced, including one student who wrote: “It also seems illogical to force students to attend a program where they are required to open up to teachers and their peers. I think you may find that forcing students into such a social situation when they don't want to be, they are more likely to close themselves off rather than open up.”

As a learning laboratory, IMSA should be comfortable with the idea of experimenting by trying a program and retiring it when it is no longer needed. As teachers, we do that in the classroom every year. Survey comments from both faculty and students suggest there was greater appreciation for Titan Crew during remote learning, but emphasized its redundancy with residential programming now. “Titan crew, Nav, Lead are all very much the same,” wrote one teacher, “So why do all three?” Another teacher offered, “Many students have told me that they think Titan Crew is redundant with student life programming, and that they do not see value in the program.” A senior registered a similar sentiment, writing, “from a senior’s perspective, I would cut down on Navigation or make some res life programming optional because the sophomores are loaded on programming.” Likewise, in an extended response, one student wrote:

For the sophomore class, there are three mandatory programs aside from reslife: NAV, Titan Crew, and LEAD. NAV is designed to provide students with counseling services and a group of friends to help adjust to campus life. On the other hand, LEAD is designed to help sophomore develop the proper leadership skills every IMSA student has. What is titan crew? Is it some attempt at a fusion of both? What are we even supposed to be doing during titan crew? Titan crew is supposed to be "student-led". Over half of titan-crew classes choose to take a nap, do homework, or leave early. For juniors and seniors, titan crew serves no purpose. You may argue that it creates an opportunity for underclassmen to bond with upperclassmen, but IMSA's tight-knit community doesn't need forced socialization. We all literally live together and welcome week already provides plenty [of] resources to bond with the community.

The student comments are not ambiguous in expressing what the majority of them want: “The program would best be dissolved,” wrote one student, before adding a comment that suggests some students find it punitive: “I wouldn’t make it mandatory for everyone, maybe the ones with lower grades.” “There’s no possible way to ‘improve’ Titan Crew,” wrote another student, “so it should just be removed.” We concur that reforming or revising Titan Crew is highly unlikely to lead to positive outcomes. For this reason, we make no recommendation beyond the termination of the program. Time is one of the most valuable commodities we have. Returning some of it to students and faculty would demonstrate appreciation and respect for the work they do.

We want to underscore that ending Titan Crew because it is redundant with extant residential and academic programming is not an indication of failure. Majorities of students here *do* feel known and cared about by a teacher (79%) and do feel a teacher knows their plans for the future (55%). But majorities disagree that Titan Crew is the reason why a faculty member knows and cares about them (57% disagree vs. 22% who agree), is the reason a faculty member knows their plans

for the future (62% - 19%), and that it helps them make connections across grade levels (60% - 18%). Rather than failure, the dissolution of Titan Crew affirms the success of the innovative residential and academic systems IMSA has created and cultivated for decades. It affirms these programs are providing positive outcomes for students, making a crew-style program superfluous here. The advent of crew-style programs at other schools is, in our opinion, an attempt to simulate relationships naturally “baked in” to the structures and, perhaps more importantly, to the *people* who staff the residential and academic programs at IMSA. As one student wrote, “While it is true that other public high schools have similar programs, like advisory, IMSA is not just a normal public high school. [...] IMSA has many untraditional practices, like dynamic schedules and I-Days, that help nurture creative and healthy minds.” Simply stated: students at IMSA already have crews.

Although we make no recommendation beyond the expiration of the Titan Crew program, we recognize there might be an urge from some to offer something in its stead. For the future action team assembled for that task, and in appreciation and honor of IMSA’s past, in which students were centered both in and out of the classroom and were one of the beacons that guided the institution, we offer the last words of our report to a student comment on our survey:

The spirit of IMSA must stay alive. IMSA students are supposed to carry Dr. Lederman's legacy. In his words, "The Academy provides acceleration as well as enrichment" (1989). The academy rests upon the basis of curiosity and passion to learn whether that's STEM related or not. In 1998 Dr. Lederman also launched the Great Minds Program. This program is what titan crew should have been. I believe that with our newly appointed academy president. Dr. Glazer, IMSA still has the chance to keep its spirits alive. I urge you all to look deeply into IMSA's fundamental principals [sic] and review past proposals such as the Great Minds Program to find a better alternative to titan crew.