

October 12, 2011

### **Student Life Committee Meeting**

Bruce Mann called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. on Wednesday, October 12, 2011

In attendance: Cameron Ford, Rebecca Kuglitsch, Nathan Little, Bruce Mann, Sierra Phillips, Geoff Proehl, Mike Segawa, Hannah Smith, Nila Wiese

The minutes from the last meeting were approved with minor corrections.

Bruce Mann reported that the faculty senate is still working on charges to the committee and filling the faculty vacancy.

Prior to turning the meeting over to Mike Segawa to continue the review of the Retention Task Force (RTF) report, Mann asked for any new business.

Cameron Ford announced changes in Inter- Fraternity Council guidelines for when men and women can visit fraternities and sororities.

Segawa informally shared with the committee a list that he gives to students at convocation: "Mikes' '15 Things To Do Before You Become a Sophomore' List." One of this year's incoming students has already checked-off all of the items.

Segawa then returned to his review of the Retention Task Force report.

We began with a discussion of mid-term grade reports, an item mentioned in the report that we had begun discussing at our last meeting. Mann asked if students paid any attention to mid-term grade reports. Nathan Little noted that folks do check to see that they are in good standing.

Mann asked how much information is being passed on that is useful in this regard. Ford mentioned an instance when he was a resident assistant of following up on a student who was struggling. Mid-term grade reports are useful in this respect. Sierra Phillips also described an instance in which a mid-term report had prompted a student to address an academic issue. Hannah Smith suggested that mid-term grades are only useful to students with academic concerns, but wondered if more feedback could help all students do better. Phillips concurred. Ford noted, however, that 60-80% of a student's grade was often determined toward the end of the class.

Segawa remarked that a student who gets more than one "U" or "F" would be contacted for follow-up, usually to develop an academic improvement plan. This process was not in place until a couple years ago.

Segawa then moved on to the issue of dismissal of students with extreme academic difficulties in the first semester at Puget Sound. We do not have many students who have

a drastically low g.p.a. (the 1.0 range), but in most cases they find it extremely difficult to recover from a slow start. The RTF report suggests that the best policy might for students not to return for the second semester, but to take a leave with the option of returning after they have gone to community college or taken other steps to improve their skills.

Nila Wiese also questioned the value of moving students through multiple semesters of academic probation, especially if, as Segawa noted, students with severe academic struggles in the first semester seldom overcome them. The financial costs for the student and parent are another reason not to unnecessarily prolong this process.

Segawa also mentioned that the vast majority of even those students who do go on a leave of absence do not return.

Segawa then moved onto items #3, 4, and 5 of the task force's recommendations: all speak to the impact of faculty with respect of advising and teaching. For example, students should come into contact with the teaching of our best faculty members in their first year. Also, the report encourages Puget Sound to put more work into training faculty about advising beyond the "nuts and bolts" of getting students into the right classes, as in the philosophy of advising or learning to identify and respond to academic struggles students face. Related to this, even though advising is part of the faculty evaluation process, we face a limitation in how to evaluate the work that faculty does in this area.

Wiese, as a faculty member, concurred, noting how difficult it often is to write this part of a file being prepared for evaluation.

Mann has advocated advisor evaluation forms, but there are challenges (selection bias, for example) and faculty are incredibly reluctant to have their advising evaluated by students, in part because they have not been trained in advising per se and because of the potential subjectivity of measurement. Mann, however, still believes this would be a good idea. Segawa concurred and noted that the Retention Task Force follow-up will address this issue. In time, faculty themselves may raise question of how we better assess advising. First, however, it is important to give faculty more resources to become better advisors.

Ford asked about the current status of training. Segawa noted that there is a session for new faculty (1-2 hours), but most of this time focuses on "nuts and bolts." Wiese noted, however, that there is no follow-up: faculty members learn as they go, discovering the numbers to call, consulting with colleagues.

Mann wondered what, from a student perspective, effective advising means. His measure is that students graduate and don't go before academic standards. Ford noted that in BLP, mentors are picked after the first year. Students talk about who to pick and who to avoid.

Wiese asked about characteristics of a good advisor. Ford suggested good knowledge of what the student should be taking; a perfect advisor would know what to do to achieve a given major. Smith met with her advisor three or four times and he didn't know who she

was; she suggested that a first step would be that an advisor should know who the student is. Phillips thought it was strange initially to have an advisor who was not in her major, but when she got an advisor in the major that knew both the department and the student, it was more helpful. She went on to suggest an advisor should be someone the student can come to with questions/concerns/plans, that the student gains more out of a personal relationship. She would not be in her current major, were it not for her advisor.

Little noted that he likes to be as independent as possible that he wants to figure it out on his own. The best thing for him has been to have a relationship that allows for support in developing an idea, as opposed to someone to help him choose his classes.

Mann commented that the students were not mentioning going to advisors for personal problems. Wiese reported hearing from academic advising that faculty should not get too involved with personal issues, in part because faculty cannot offer students full confidentiality. Smith offered that she would go to an advisor for academics, but not personal issues. Ford and Little agreed. Advisors need to be knowledgeable and straightforward about the major, about classes, more than personal counselors. This approach, according to Segawa, works well overall. It can be improved within this structure.

Smith returned to the issue of placement in first semester classes and the need, perhaps, for general advisors. Segawa replied that the academic advising office is currently the backstop for advising needs not met by the faculty advisor.

Ford asked for more information about the way in which students are placed in first year classes and with advisors. Segawa offered more background on how the logistics of this, including issues such as faculty work load and the interest survey students complete prior to coming to campus. Mann also suggested, in terms of whether or not students begin with advisors in their potential major, that students often change their areas of interest. Phillips made the point that even if the advisor was in a major in which she was not interested, having an advisor teaches students how to develop a relationship with a faculty member, a fundamental skill.

Segawa said that BLP and Music both represent best practices in advising, although they also surface in the natural sciences, in part through lab time spent with the student. Segawa also observed that the RTF suggests reducing exposure of students to adjuncts in first year situations to adjuncts, in part because those faculty many not be as available to develop a longer-term academic relationship.

Segawa asked if good advising was just sending the student his or her advising code? The general consensus was that this is not a good model, even for Little who prefers his independence.

Meeting adjourned at 9:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Geoff Proehl, Theatre Arts