

Minutes of the Student Life Committee
October 26, 2011

Present: Lisa Ferrari, Cameron Ford, Rebecca Kuglitsch, Bruce Mann, Sierra Phillips, Geoff Proehl, Mike Segawa, Hannah Smith, Nila Wiese

Mann called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. He called for new business, but there was none.

Smith and Wiese expressed concerns about the course schedule for the coming semester, particularly regarding the selection of courses and the times they are offered. Some interdisciplinary programs will be offering very limited courses. Courses tend to cluster around 11:00, especially on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule. Ferrari explained the challenges of staffing courses for interdisciplinary programs, especially since the university is currently staffing fewer sabbatical replacements.

Mann was contacted by Amy Spivey, the committee's Senate liaison, regarding charges. The Senate is also working on finding an additional faculty member for the committee.

Segawa explained that the Senate's charges were based on the committee's self-charges from last year:

1. Review the university's progress on planning a new residence hall
2. Review and make recommendations on the university's planning to increase student retention rates
3. Review and make recommendations on the university's programs and initiatives for traditionally under-represented student groups

To begin to address those charges, Segawa presented more information from the Retention Task Force (RTF) final report. The RTF found that some students who struggled in their first year at Puget Sound had been taught that year by one or more adjunct/visiting faculty members. While the university hires many talented faculty members on term contracts, students felt their instructors' lack of long-term investment in the university and students.

Mann asked the student members whether, when choosing courses, they pay attention to whether a faculty member is term or tenure-line. Ford said he thinks students aren't aware of whether their professors are tenure-line or not. Phillips commented that students tend to choose professors who have a reputation for good teaching. Wiese articulated the benefits of having tenure-line faculty teaching first-year students. One benefit could be the possibility of a long-term academic relationship between the student and faculty member. Another benefit could be

the faculty member's ability, based on experience, to communicate our campus culture and help new students navigate that culture. Segawa thought there might be ways to encourage departments to work on the development and acculturation of adjunct/visiting faculty.

Segawa reported that the RTF found the university needs to provide better messaging about academic norms. New student orientation might be a place to reinforce the university's culture of academic rigor.

The RTF suggested bringing Passages and Perspectives groups back together at points during the semester. This received mixed reactions from the student members of the committee. Phillips wondered whether developing stronger identities of Passages and Perspectives groups would undermine the community-building work of Residence Life. Segawa responded that this was not the intention, and that he would like to see Residence Life staff being attentive to residents' academic, as well as social and personal, concerns. Phillips commented that Residence Life staff members are trained to look for strugglers, rather than to celebrate successes. That emphasis may need to shift if Residence Life staff members are going to be part of a push to promote greater academic rigor. Ford and Segawa suggested that Residence Life staff could help address questions that are common to all students, such as how to approach a professor during office hours.

Proehl said that he values the university's holistic approach to education. He is glad we encourage students to do more than simply grind out their classwork. Even small comments can encourage students to see intellectual engagement as part of their many activities on campus.

Segawa and Smith have spoken with students who find the campus atmosphere outside of class to be less intellectually challenging than they had hoped. Mann noted that he finds few students discussing issues of the day outside of class or the topic of a campus lecture after the event is over. Committee members discussed sources of information about upcoming events, the technologies that students use to spread such information, and the effect of having a truly engaging speaker.

Segawa wondered whether Puget Sound has a culture of questioning its own rigor, rather than acknowledging the places it occurs.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Ferrari