

Student Life Committee Minutes September 23, 2009

Attending: Bruce Mann, Aislinn Melchior, Jeff Proehl, Alison Tracy Hale, Jan Leuchtenberger, Mike Segawa.

In the time since the last meeting, Bruce Mann had accepted the Committee's nomination as Chair. He convened the meeting at 2:20.

The Committee briefly reviewed the discussions of the last meeting for the benefit of those who had been unable to attend.

Discussion turned to the Residential Seminars. The following issues were discussed:

1. Three Committee members who have taught or currently are teaching Residential Seminars described their experiences. Differences noted by these faculty between regular freshman seminars and residential ones included:
 - a. The fact that the students were living together meant that any clash of personalities was magnified and tended to seep into the classroom dynamic.
 - b. The different skill levels of the students (which is always present in freshman seminars) were more noticeable to students who also lived together. This tended to breed a sense of competition and, occasionally, made students who struggled feel inferior.

2. In response to these observations, some members wondered what the appropriate action might be in the face of these issues:
 - a. To separate the academic from the residential aspect?
 - b. To try to match the residential aspect of the experience more closely to student interests?

3. To help address these concerns, Mike Segawa explained some of the background of the residential seminar program.
 - a. The residential program was originally set up in response to complaints of some students that there was little academic discussion going on outside of the classroom.
 - b. This issue was also evident in the Retention Task Force report – a complaint of some students who contemplated leaving (or did leave) Puget Sound was that the conversations started in class rarely continued outside of class.
 - c. The residential seminars were meant to address this by bringing the academic culture into the residential environment.
 - d. In early discussions with students about the residential idea, most said they didn't want to be grouped early on by major interest, but that they wouldn't mind living with people in their first-semester

seminar in order to build a separate intellectual group from that of their major interest. That way it would still be intellectual and not just social (as other groups on campus would be), but it would not be restricted to their major interest.

- e. When the Residential Seminars were set up, it was the goal of Student Affairs to make sure the non-academic aspects of the residential component did not interfere with the classroom.
4. Committee members noted that despite that goal, it seems inevitable that aspects of the residential component will seep into the classroom. More specifically, the classroom dynamic seems to be magnified by the residential component: if things are already good, the residential aspect makes them better; but if things are bad, it makes them worse.

The Committee members observed that faculty involved in the Residential Seminars seem to want to do more to support the living/learning environment, and might benefit from some kind of seminar or training to help them deal with the dynamics created by the residential component.

5. The Committee members asked Mike Segawa where the Residential Seminar program stands now. He responded that:
- a. The program is in its last year of Mellon Grant funding, so a decision needs to be made about whether to continue it or not. This could entail using some existing Student Affairs funds, or it could mean going to the Budget Task Force to ask for more funds.
 - b. The Residential Seminar Working Group is gathering more data to help determine the effectiveness of the Seminars. That group does not have faculty members on it. If this Committee would like to weigh in on the debate, they could do so. A meeting between the Working Group and this Committee could also be arranged.

The Committee briefly considered future action on the Retention Task Force report. Mike Segawa said that the Committee could go over the report and discuss it. The Task Force will also be meeting with various groups on campus, and this Committee could be one of them.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Leuchtenberger