

Minutes of the Student Life Committee
April 6, 2011

Present: Peter Bittner, Lisa Ferrari, Cameron Ford, Rebecca Kuglitsch, Bruce Mann (Chair), Geoff Proehl, Mike Segawa

Guest: Dave Wright

Mann called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

The committee approved the minutes from March 23, 2011.

Segawa introduced Wright, who is University Chaplain and Director of the Office of Spirituality, Service, and Social Justice (SSSJ). Puget Sound is unusual in combining its chaplaincy with the office that handles community service projects. Other universities are moving in this direction.

Wright spoke about the history and mission of SSSJ. For about thirty years, until Wright's arrival in 2006, the university had a Center for Spirituality and Justice overseen by the University Chaplain. Wright reconfigured the office into three related sectors: religious life, social justice, and community service. All three share a common concern with helping students find meaning in their social context.

Wright gave examples of programs from each sector:

- 1) Community service programs are generally organized through the Community Involvement and Action Center (CIAC), which has been run by Jacki Pearce-Droge since its inception twenty-three years ago. CIAC largely runs on raised funds, rather than university funding, so grant writing is an important part of Pearce-Droge's responsibilities. CIAC runs the Kids Can Do program, which is modeled on Big Brother/Big Sister programs. The Empowerment Through Collaboration (ETC) tutoring program pairs Puget Sound students with local students needing tutors. The original focus was on math tutoring, but ETC has expanded to include other areas of study. For the past two years, CIAC has been working with New Student Orientation leaders, especially through Urban Plunge, to identify students who may be interested in volunteering during their time in college.

In addition, some faculty members have contacted Wright for assistance adding community outreach programs to their classes. Bittner asked whether any courses have community service requirements. Wright replied that he is generally asked to help

faculty members make contact with partners in the community, though few courses require such outreach of all students.

- 2) The historical focus of campus religious life programming has been on student-led clubs. The majority of programming had a Christian focus. Wright came to Puget Sound hoping to support the breadth of students' religious and non-religious practices. He has overseen three changes to de-emphasize Christianity as the dominant religious presence.
 - a. Restructuring the long-standing "peer minister" positions into seven "interfaith coordinator" positions intended to address the needs of students of many faiths or no faith.
 - b. Hiring student staff members from many religious traditions.
 - c. Working with Facilities Services on remodeling Kilworth Memorial Chapel to meet the needs of multiple religious traditions through the addition of a Muslim prayer room and a meditation room.

Christian students had been organized into many small clubs. Wright is encouraging them to work together more to develop a larger Christian community.

- 3) The heart of the social justice component of SSSJ is a program called Justice and Service in Tacoma (JUST). Students meet weekly for a rotating schedule of three types of programs (documentary and discussion, guest speaker, volunteer experience). Four years ago, SSSJ began offering an Alternative Break program in Tacoma. Students engage in and reflect on community service work. The Fall Break draws more participants than does the Spring Break. This year, SSSJ piloted a travel Alternative Spring Break to San Francisco. The eight participants found it worthwhile.

Segawa commented that SSSJ is trying to create a "service pathway" for students' time at Puget Sound. The pathway begins with Urban Plunge and ideally continues through volunteer service during the student's time here.

Proehl was impressed with the programs Wright described. He asked whether Wright had insight into whether students felt the campus community treated their religious beliefs with respect. Wright replied that this is a complex question. He noted that we are a very secular campus in a very secular part of the country. More aggressive national recruiting of students means that we are attracting students who are accustomed to a different climate regarding religion. Both students of strong faith and students of no faith have reported feeling marginalized on campus. Many students find that our campus is not welcoming of open conversation about religion.

Segawa noted that many Puget Sound students report an interest in spirituality, but no formal religious identification. Student Affairs is currently engaged in discussions on the roles of faculty/staff advisors, free speech, and proselytizing in campus religious life. He noted that the good relationship between the Academic and Student Affairs Divisions help facilitate such discussions.

Bittner asked whether Wright tries to bring together the leaders of various religious organizations. Wright responded that the chaplaincy had historically required such leaders to participate in an advisory group. This model did not work well. Wright is now attempting to create a new model for coordinating the efforts of various religious groups on campus.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Ferrari