

Student Life Committee Minutes

Date: December 4, 2019

Attendees: Jess Smith (chair), Kate Gladhart-Hayes, Zaixin Hong, Alan Krause, Mike Valentine, Adriana Flores (minutes-taker)

Jess called to order at 4:02pm

Minutes of the November 6, 2019 meeting approved with minor revisions.

No Announcements.

Discussion items for meeting:

1. Identify best practices for faculty integration into the learning communities program
 - a. Can use best practices from other institutions
 - b. Make action items for next semester
2. Faculty senate charge to reflect on the structure of this committee and brainstorm any alternative ways of operating

Learning Communities conversations:

- General thoughts on 11/6/19 presentation on learning communities:
 - Zaixin shared that he learned a lot from the last meeting. Now that the new curriculum is being voted on, once a model is chosen the mentoring component will inevitably affect the learning communities. We may have to wait a while for that decision to happen.
 - Adriana reiterated that funding seems to be an area that Student Affairs will need our help in generating ideas.
 - Jess mentioned trustee level buy-in. She was very impressed by the Student of Color buy-in and their level of research. Also great connections to the Tacoma community. Impressed by the student initiative, which shows that need is clearly strong.
 - Mike shared that faculty buy-in will be critical. Selling point might be that the students came to the administration with this need. Potentially we could lobby to get faculty involved.
- Committee members experience with first-year seminars and differences between departments:
 - As the faculty coordinator for the BLP residence program, Alan has course-releases to deal with this work. Courses releases will be a huge consideration when planning the new learning communities program.
 - Zaixin shared that in a regular freshman seminar, there is an urgency present in those courses. That urgency can be helpful, because if there is an immediate response to an idea, there will be forward momentum. A residency component could help continue the momentum of learning within those groups.

- Mike shared that coming from a small department, his students bond pretty quickly. That might not be present in larger departments. Bonding often happens when difficult classes start coming up, often during students' second years
 - Jess asked where is the need? What departments are students getting lost in? Departments like theatre naturally bond students. Most bonding happens sophomore year for them.
 - Zaixin stated that field trips can also bond students.
 - Kate shared that if the majors are more independent, you may not know the other students in your major. There may be a couple of departmental activities, but not much beyond.
 - Alan stated that Business is a large major where people can get lost. Also, first year students don't take any business classes--so they aren't bonded in a significant way.
 - In discussing first-year seminars as feeders to a major, Jess shared that theatre seminar classes are not always feeders and often have many different types of students in them.
 - Zaixin mentioned the role of transfer students. Question to consider: What are learning community options for transfer students? Something to keep in mind as we continue this conversation.
- Perceived goals for the learning communities program:
 - Alan shared that there seem to be two main goals for the learning communities program:
 - Goal 1: Feed into an academic pursuit;
 - Goal 2: Create community and identity.
 - Kate shared her experience as a first-year student. She naturally found communities within the Chemistry department and Honors program.
 - Zaixin stated he feels it's good to have communities outside of the major--which these communities could provide. Provides a more interdisciplinary approach beyond your major.
 - Mike shared that for first year students interested in sciences, students often don't know exactly what they want to learn. So there could be a learning community about the natural sciences that would help them explore the individual disciplines and pick a major.
 - Jess stated the communities could go beyond departments, such as an outdoor programs community, that would be explicitly multi-departmental.
 - Next steps for SLC:
 - **Question:** What models exist at other institutions/which models work best? Specifically, how are faculty involved/impacted by learning communities at other institutions
 - **Our plan:** We'll each be assigned a few other schools to investigate faculty participation and do a quick write-up
 - Schools we heard mentioned during 11/6/2019 meeting:
 - Emory (Alan)
 - PLU (Mike)

- Reed (Zaixin)
- Knox (Mike)
- Occidental (Alan)
- St. Lawrence (Adrian)
- Whitman (Adriana)
- Lewis & Clark (Adriana)
- Willamette (Adrian)
- Worth asking Uchenna/Megan about what other universities we should look at. Jess will reach out to them.
- What to look for:
 - How are faculty used
 - Challenges for faculty
 - Issues re: compensation

SLC structure conversation:

- Alan conveyed that the SLC committee used to be structured so that every member also served as a liaison to another committee, such as conduct office, diversity, etc. An option is to return to this structure if we think it will create a positive relationship with the Division of Student Affairs.
- Jess suggested that we could ask Dr. Baker if they'd like us to liaise with them. If not, we need to reconsider the best way to use our time and efforts.
- Questions for consideration:
 - Do we have meetings once a month, do we have smaller meetings?
 - Do we have enough members? If there's work to be done, we may need to bring more people on-board.
- Alan stated support for carrying on with our current size and adjusting as needed.
- Zaixin stated that the curriculum vote will likely inform our structure as well.

Smith announced the adjournment of the meeting at 4:47pm.