

## **Student Life Committee: End of Year Report 2019/2020**

### **SUMMARY**

This year, the Student Life Committee (SLC) redefined its purpose and engaged meaningfully with the office of the Dean of Students by contributing to discussions of living-learning communities and changing when Greek houses recruit first-year students. Looking forward to next year, the SLC recommends that it continue to work on creating living-learning communities, contribute to work on curricular education during a period of social distancing, and define other topics of interest in conjunction with the Dean of Students.

### **MEMBERS**

The following were assigned to the Students Life Committee this year:

- Uchenna Baker (Dean of Students)
- Jess Smith (Faculty, chair in fall, on sabbatical during spring)
- Alan Krause (Faculty, chair in spring)
- Zaixin Hong (Faculty)
- Mike Valentine (Faculty)
- Adrian Villicana (Faculty)
- Adriana Flores (Staff)
- Kate Gladhart-Hayes (Student)
- Bennett Johnson (Student)
- Meylin Serrano Gavarrete (Student)
- Laneka Viney (Student, ASUPS, Director of Student Interests)

Chris Kendall served as the Faculty Senate Liaison.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This year-end report addresses the charges, activities, and accomplishments of the SLC. It is intended to inform the Faculty Senate and university leadership as a whole of the committee's work during 2019/2020 and to facilitate planning for the committee's work in 2020/2021.

### **CHARGES**

This year, the SLC received the following charges from the Faculty Senate:

1. Seek ways to collaborate more effectively with relevant student bodies and populations, namely ASUPS, underrepresented groups of undergraduate students, and graduate students.
2. Continue assisting and advising the Department of Students Affairs as it continues its process of formulation and implementation of a new strategic plan and organizational structure.

3. Evaluate the possibility of an alternative SLC structure in which it would incorporate ASUPS liaisons, media program advisors, and Bookend/Orientation Committee members. Based on this evaluation, propose an alternative committee structure and any necessary changes to the Bylaws.

The SLC did not receive any self-charges from last year's committee.

## **ACTIVITIES**

The SLC addressed three topics this year: 1) defining its purpose and structure, 2) developing opportunities for living-learning communities, and 3) assessing the proposed change of Greek house recruiting to fall semester. It met six times, three times in the fall and three times in the spring to accomplish these tasks.

### **Defining the Purpose and Structure of the Student Life Committee**

**History:** During the tenure of former Dean of Students, Mike Segawa, the SLC had unique structure and function among standing committees. Each member of the SLC participated in another "home-committee" and came together on the SLC to share information on topics that their home committees addressed related to student life. With this structure, the SLC served as a forum for information exchange and made few decisions and took little action on its own.

When Dean Segawa left Puget Sound in the spring of 2017, the SLC lost both its structure and purpose. Beginning in the 2017/18 academic year, SLC members no longer uniformly participated in other university committees. The SLC adopted the more general purpose of working with Provost Bartanen, who supervised the Department of Student Affairs until a new Dean of Students was found. During the 2018/2019 academic year, it began working with Dr. Baker, the school's new Dean of Students. Unfortunately, during the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 academic years, the SLC lacked a clear structure or purpose and members began to wonder whether they were collectively "wasting their time."

**Present:** In the fall of 2019, the Student Life Committee welcomed the charge to redefine its purpose. In discussion with Dr. Baker, the committee committed to working more closely to support the work of the Department of Student Affairs and to define and focus on specific areas of need. In addition, SLC committed to receive training and serve on conduct boards: two member of the SLC were invited to receive training and participated on conduct boards this year. The SLC discussed it's structure in the Fall with Dr. Baker (see minutes from 10/2/2019) and again in the spring with Senator Kendall (see minutes of 2/19/2020). In both discussions, the SLC concluded that working with the Dean of students to define topics to address provided the greatest opportunity to contribute to the university.

Members also discussed the optimal size of the SLC. If necessary, the SLC could be larger or smaller, but committee members should be devoted to the SLC, not asked to serve on two committees at once. The work that the SLC has undertaken this year required time and focus that would not be feasible for members juggling the responsibilities of two committees. Members also suggested that the SLC include at least two student members who attend meetings. During 2019/2020 only one student member (Kate Gladhart-Hayes) attended meetings, creating undue pressure on this student each time the SLC asked for a student perspective.

For the 2019/2020 academic year, in consultation with Dr. Baker, the SLC committed to help develop living-learning communities. Moving forward, the SLC should continue to work closely with Dr. Baker and, in consultation with her, define the project(s) that it will focus on each year (see minutes from 10/2/2019 and 2/19/2020 for additional detail).

### **Investigating Living-Learning Communities**

The SLC committed to assisting Dr. Baker to investigate living-learning communities in the 2019/2020 academic year. It performed three tasks in pursuit of this goal: 1) learned about living-learning communities at Puget Sound; 2) investigated living-learning communities at other universities; and 3) began developing opportunities for additional living-learning communities at Puget Sound.

***Living-learning communities at Puget Sound:*** The committee heard about both current and proposed living-learning communities at Puget Sound. Meghan FinCannon presented on the of five types of current living-learning communities: Theme houses, The Michel Rocchi International District, SSI's organized as residential learning communities, the Honors Program, and the Business Leadership Program. Two students who contribution to creating the Students of Color Community Initiative presented their proposal to create a living-learning community for students of color. These existing and proposed programs demonstrate that Puget Sound has valuable experience operating living-learning communities (see minutes from 11/6/2019 and 12/4/2019 for additional detail).

***Investigation of living-learning communities at other institutions:*** Committee members researched living-learning communities at a wide variety of schools, including large universities and small liberal arts colleges, and found that many schools use living-learning communities far more extensively than Puget Sound. Some schools created living-learning communities primarily for first-year students; others focused on providing them to upper class students. Some universities created communities with a strong academic focus that required attendance at events and written assignments; others had few requirements and their living-learning communities acted more like theme houses. Different institutions organized living-learning communities around completely different topics. Some tied them directly to a student's demographic identity (e.g., the Black Male Initiative), others focused on an academic discipline (e.g., German), and others investigated topics that intentionally crossed disciplines (e.g., Health and Happiness). This investigation made clear that the University of Puget Sound has many important choices in planning the living-learning communities that it will create (see notes from 12/4/2019 and 2/19/2020 for additional detail).

***Developing opportunities for additional living-learning communities at Puget Sound.*** Committee members defined three key characteristics for Puget Sound's living-learning communities.

First, students served. In light of the university's commitment to help first-year students engage and feel comfortable at Puget Sound, the SLC recommends focusing on living-learning communities for first-year students. Communities would target first year students, providing them a place to gather with like-minded students who would give them stronger social connections in their first year and a sense of Puget Sound as "home." However, each community would welcome and encourage sophomores, juniors, and seniors to maintain affiliations with the living-learning communities in which they participated during their first year. Although only first-year students would live in the communities,

other students would be welcome to participate in community events. In this way, sophomores, juniors, and seniors could continue to receive support from their living-learning communities.

Second, community purpose. In response to informal requests from students that living-learning communities maintain a balance between student privacy and faculty engagement, the SLC recommends a mix of social and academic events. Students and resident life staff would coordinate social events in the dorms. Faculty would lead presentations and discussions in academic buildings. Students, primarily upper class students, would also be invited to conduct presentations and discussions for the living-learning community. This will provide opportunities for student leadership and allow upper class students to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Third, community themes. The SLC sought topics that were simultaneously specific to the interests of Puget Sound students and broad enough to encompass various academic disciplines. SLC members inquired informally with colleagues and students to gauge their interest in a number of topics. In addition to strongly supporting the proposed Students of Color Community Initiative, the SLC recommends that Puget Sound pursue one or more of the following living-learning communities:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Social Change and Activism
- Science and Society

The SLC's work on living-learning communities was cut short by moving students off campus. The SLC intends to continue to continue this work with the Dean of Students next year (see notes from 10/2/2019, 2/19/2020, and 4/22/2020 for additional detail).

### **Greek House Recruiting Schedule**

The SLC reviewed the Fraternity and Sorority Recruitment Proposal and met with Moe Stephens, Director of Student Involvement, to assess the proposal to move Greek house recruitment from spring semester to fall semester.

The Greek houses seek this change primarily to better serve the needs of junior and senior members of the houses. As sophomores typically live in the Greek houses and juniors and seniors in Greek life typically live off campus, recruiting early in fall semester would provide these juniors and seniors more security in their housing decisions. Early recruiting would allow each Greek house to project how many sophomores would live in the house the following year and how many juniors and seniors would be required to live in-house to fill the remaining rooms. Those members of Greek life who would not be required to live in the Greek houses would then be free to sign leases with area landlords in off campus housing. Many local landlords currently require students to commit in October to rent a house or apartment for the following academic year. Previously, area landlords asked for commitments in February or later. However, as the housing market around campus has grown more competitive, landlords have asked students to sign leases in October. Juniors in Greek life are currently unable to pursue these off campus housing opportunities as leases must be signed before Greek life recruitment takes place in January.

The Greek houses believe that changing recruiting to fall semester will also increase the number of students who participate in Greek life, increase first year retention, and improve student leadership in the Greek houses.

The SLC expressed a mix of support for Greek life in general and concern for the proposal. Faculty expressed concern that recruitment requires a significant amount of students' time. Faculty know that all students who participate in recruitment have less time to complete academic work for a week or more around recruitment. Faculty would like recruitment to take place at a time that minimizes impact on students' academic success. Staff and students members of the SLC, all of whom had participated in Greek life at Puget Sound, expressed concerns that fall recruitment would reduce student participation in Greek life. Each related their personal experience of choosing to join Greek life because they had enjoyed the opportunity to meet students in Greek life before recruitment. If recruitment were held in the first part of fall semester, students like them would not have the opportunity to meet members of the Greek houses, would not develop in interest in Greek life, and would not have joined (see notes from 3/11/2020 for additional detail).

### **SELF CHARGES FOR 2020/2021**

In light of the SLC's newly defined structure, its work during the 2019/2020 academic year, and the challenges that the college currently faces, the SLC proposes the following self-charges for 2020/2021:

1. Continue to work closely with the Office of the Dean of Students and, in consultation with the Dean of Students, define the topics that it will address in 2020/2021.
2. To continue its work on living-learning communities. Specifically to define a clear structure for faculty participation and to engage faculty support for specific living-learning community themes.
3. To help the university develop effective co-curricular education during a time of social distancing.