

Student Life Committee Minutes November 7, 2007

Attending: Nick Kontogeorgopoulos, Mike Segawa, Carrie Washburn, Jack Royce, Cathy Hale, Mita Mahato, Jan Leuchtenberger, Dana Raike and guests Jannie Meisberger and Randy Nelson.

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking Jannie and Randy for coming. He reminded the committee that he had asked Randy to come and bring us any information he had in existing survey results that would help us understand the issues confronting returning study abroad students, and he asked Jannie to attend and tell us what is currently being done for returnees and what more could be done.

Randy handed out to all members of the Committee a summary of the results he found in a comparison between students who went on study abroad and those who don't. He took the data from the NSSE, which is given in spring to freshmen and seniors, and from the Senior Survey, which is given in spring to imminent graduates. The summary includes differences that are consistent over two years. Some of the results are included below:

1. In the NSSE, the only question whose answers showed significant difference between those who had studied abroad and those who hadn't had to do with students' evaluation of their own general education. Those who had been abroad "rated their growth as greater than non-study-abroad students."
2. From the Senior Survey, "those who had studied abroad were more likely than those who had not to rate work for social change as an essential consideration when selecting a career. Those who had not studied abroad were more likely than those who had to value high potential income and a stable, secure future as important or essential career considerations."
3. Also from the Senior Survey, "seniors who had studied abroad were more likely than those who had not to have reported great growth in their ability to read or speak a foreign language; appreciate art; relate to people of different races, nations, and religions; place problems in a historical perspective; and function independently. Those who had not studied abroad were more likely than those who had to have reported great growth in their ability to evaluate the role of science and technology in society."
4. Also from the Senior Survey, those who studied abroad were more likely to be satisfied with available program, while of those who had not, "over one-fourth of the seniors were dissatisfied with their opportunities for internships or study abroad."

The conclusions Randy reached from his analysis of the data were as follows: “Some of the differences between the groups might be attributable to the selection processes and curricular limitations related to study abroad. To be eligible for study abroad, students must maintain an adequate GPA (non-study-abroad students had lower GPAs). In addition, students in certain majors (e.g., sciences) find it difficult to study abroad due to the curricular demands of their major. This probably accounts for the difference on the question related to science and technology. Overall, the group differences are consistent with what might be expected from the experiences of study abroad. Apart from lower satisfaction with financial aid packages, there is little evidence to suggest that participating in study abroad results in social or academic adjustment issues.”

The Chair noted that the lack of evidence that study abroad results in social or academic adjustment issues runs counter to anecdotal evidence we have heard, and may be because the questions are asked about a year after the students’ return, when they may already have adjusted.

Jannie noted that there is a difference in adjustment for students coming back at the end of spring, who have summer to adjust, and those who come back at the end of fall and need to jump back in immediately. She also noted that while some faculty feel that returning students want to re-enter the campus community but seem to have difficulty, others feel that the issue is more that students come back ready to finish and leave.

Jannie then described the “Welcome Back Celebration” that is currently held twice a year for students returning from study abroad. The celebration replaces an older “re-entry workshop” that did not attract many students. The celebration gives the students a chance to be formally welcomed home by the Dean and to share their experiences with friends who went to other places. Also, one student who has been back for a year is asked to talk about the re-entry experience. Dave Wright is asked to attend and give students tips about how to get involved with social justice issues because so many come back influenced by what they saw abroad.

A Committee member asked if students were given opportunities to talk about their individual experiences at the celebration, and Jannie responded that the program is brief and they can mingle afterwards.

A member pointed out that the issue is not only how we can help the students with re-entry, but also how the campus can benefit from their experiences.

Jannie said there is a mandatory questionnaire students fill out about their experiences and those are available in the International Programs office for other students to read. They are read by Jannie and one other staff member to evaluate the programs and student issues.

The office used to send out a list of returning study abroad students to all faculty to let them know who in their classes might have relevant experiences to share, but they stopped doing this. The Committee agreed that a way should be found to re-institute this.

The Chair pointed out that the International Programs office runs with only two full-time staff members and it might be difficult for them to do more than they already do.

Mike suggested that since the largest group returns in spring, perhaps work-study staff from Student Affairs could collect specific information about each student, what each did and what each is interested in pursuing. This information could then be used to help faculty connect with the students and make use of their experience. Student Affairs involvement in this ties in with its co-curricular activities and the engagement initiative it is currently pursuing.

Chair suggested a question be added to the mandatory questionnaire given to returnees asking if each would be willing to speak about his/her experiences if contacted by faculty or Student Affairs.

Randy also pointed out that his office has new software that can convert existing surveys to online ones that would make data collection much easier and encourage a greater response.

Mike said that Student Affairs would like to collaborate with Jannie's office to make more opportunities available to returning students to bring their experiences to the campus community.

Jannie remarked that there should be more communication about events on campus so that if there are those that would tie into Study Abroad, she can participate.

The Committee wondered how best to communicate – students seem to prefer electronic messages, while faculty often prefer paper.

A student member suggested having a special section in the Trail which features in each issue a profile of one returning student and his/her experiences. The Committee agreed that was a great idea.

The Committee agreed that immediate action on the issue should include adding a question to the questionnaire about whether students would be willing to speak of their experiences, and using Student Affairs work-study staff to compile answers to the questionnaires and make that information more widely available.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 am
Respectfully submitted,
Jan Leuchtenberger

The next meeting of the Student Life Committee will be Wednesday, Nov. 28.