

Student Life Committee
Minutes
Jan. 26, 2011

Bruce Mann called the committee to order shortly after 4 p.m.

In attendance: Peter Bittner, Peggy Burge, Bill Dasher, Lisa Ferrari, Cameron Ford, Bruce Mann, Geoff Proehl, Alyssa Raymond, Mike Segawa

The committee approved the minutes from our last meeting.

Bruce Mann announced the agenda for the semester: issues around student retention; issues around information literacy; issues around diversity.

Mann then turned the meeting over to Mike Segawa for a presentation relevant to the first of these three issues: the results of a sophomore survey as part of the work of the Retention Task Force.

Segawa noted that the university puts a good deal of emphasis on employing “best practices” with our incoming class and feels confident that we are doing strong work at that level, but that we don’t know about or program as much for the sophomore year, a critical year with respect to student retention. The sophomore survey is similar in form to the survey given to first year students, but was administered earlier in the academic year.

Segawa then shared themes that he and his office found in the surveys as they reviewed them. (Committee members had been sent summaries prior to the meeting.)

First, Segawa noted that the survey indicates that the university is doing well in many ways, particularly in terms of faculty and academic engagement. Overall, our sophomores seem highly engaged and this is the single biggest indicator of retention.

The survey focused on about a dozen issues/problems with respect to scholarly and social life: e.g. – level of intellectual engagement; the sense that professors are interested in teaching; degree to which the students attend functions on campus outside of their classes; the students’ sense that they are capable of succeeding academically; whether or not students feel that they are receiving a good education for the cost. The lowest rated statistically significant item was for number of visits to the Center for Writing, Learning, and Teaching; the highest rated item was for students’ perception that they are capable of succeeding here.

One outlier result that the office has not yet unpacked was that Asian students reported significantly lower levels of engagement, but had higher levels of retention.

Segawa noted, as well, that in a recent climate survey, Asian students reported being significantly less happy with their campus life than some other groups.

Segawa further brought to our attention three persistent issues that the survey underscores: 1. the importance of a faculty advisor; 2. the challenges of time management that emerge in the sophomore year; 3. the link between living off campus and student retention.

Item #3 led to the first major discussion of the day around the challenges associated with procrastination. Between first and second year respondents there is a significant increase in the degree to which students perceive themselves as having a problem with this issue. The discussion touched on strategies for addressing the (perceived) problem and reasons for the increase: students are encountering the heightened demands of college life and learning, by trial and at times failure, how to deal with them. The committee also explored the role of faculty intervention, particularly whether it was useful to create various sorts of safety nets so that students would not fail or to allow students to experience the natural consequences of poor time management and so learn from that experience.

The conversation then moved toward item #3: the downsides of living off campus, particularly students feeling more socially disconnected from campus life. Students reported that the off-campus experience was not quite what they had hoped or expected it to be. The discussion around this issue included questions regarding what kind of residential life programming is available for off-campus students. Segawa noted that residential life programming for off-campus students was minimal.

The challenge coming out of this survey is determining what the university should focus on doing in the students' second year to increase engagement with Puget Sound. In this regard, Segawa noted that class identification (year of graduation) is not strong amongst students and that fraternities/sororities have developed effective means of fostering a sense of connectedness. He also noted that in general students tend to feel less connected to Puget Sound as seniors than first or second year students.

The committee considered reasons for this, including the idea that it may be part of a natural growth cycle. We discussed in particular, following Lisa Ferrari's prompt, the role that study abroad might play in this phenomenon. Re-integration of study abroad students, although being addressed through lists of returning students being sent to faculty, is an issue. Students sense that although they may have had a remarkable experience away from campus that when they return faculty and peers are not all that interested in hearing about what they've done, which indeed may be the case. The idea of a house for study abroad students to return to was floated as one possibility for fostering positive reintegration, along with offering students who study abroad other ways to reflect upon their experiences: as invited guests in

classes (although relevance to many content areas is an issue) or through writing, as in current blogs on the campus web site in which students report on their travels.

All in all, Segawa noted that there are not a lot of models out there for addressing these issues and that for now at least trying to do what we are currently doing *better* is more the plan than to initiate some new set of programs, since just what those programs would be is difficult to discern.

The issue of midterm grades briefly came up, just prior to adjournment.

Mann asked Peggy Burge to speak with us at our next meeting, in two weeks, about information literacy and the campus.

Meeting adjourned by the chair at 4:50.

Respectfully submitted –

Geoff Proehl, Theatre Arts