

Student Life Committee Meeting
March 23, 2011

Meeting called to order by Bruce Mann at 4:06 p.m.

In attendance: Peggy Burge, William Dasher, Lisa Ferrari, Bruce Mann, Geoff Proehl, Czarina Ramsay, Alyssa Raymond, Mike Segawa, Stephanie Wood

Minutes from the last two sessions (Feb. 9 and Feb. 23) approved with minor corrections.

Bruce Mann announced that this meeting would focus on a continuation of the session begun on Feb. 23 with Czarina Ramsay on multicultural services (MCS) from the Dean of Students office.

Ramsay had presented at our last session on support services.

We had left off on a dialogue about campus climate. Ramsay indicated a hope to continue that conversation.

Mann mentioned, from last session, the concern over the "Graduates of Color" planning process in 2009-2010 (a challenging series of conversations about what it means to be a student of color and who was or was not happy to be described as such) and the ways in which the challenges encountered in those conversations led to a re-appraisal of multicultural services at Puget Sound, particularly a shift from a program-oriented approach to student-mentorship approach.

Ramsay feels that the "Grads of Color" conversation brought to the surface campus climate issues around how students do and do not identify.

Examples of the shift in her role:

1. More of an emphasis on supervision of MCS staff including more one on one meetings with staff members;
2. More of an intentional structure with Student Diversity Center groups meeting together including educational training (e.g. – Dexter Gordon on campus activism) and a planned retreat later this spring. These are examples of taking time to get to know people individually and exploring possible collaborations.

Segawa also reflected on the "Graduates of Color" conversations, noting that one result was that faculty members felt some of our junior and seniors were not where they should be at this point in their education around issues of identity. Faculty felt ownership in "missing the boat" in educating our students, that they had not met the needs of those students. We can have all sorts of diversity programming, but if we do not mentor our students, we may not be equipping them well. Students come in as freshman and do "I am Puget Sound," but what happens after that. MCS still wants to do awareness programming, but is now trying to do more to develop a sense of community and affinity amongst our students of color.

Ramsay noted the absence of a history of regular conversation or collaborative relationships in the past among different identity groups, which now Ramsay is initiating with her staff and the governing council.

Ferrari and Mann asked for further clarification about the need for this work.

Segawa responded that we want our students to connect to the larger campus community, but that for many of our students of color strong sub-communities are important for their success. The goal is to have, for example, a viable Native American student association so that those who want that can find it here. Segawa feels we can do a better job of this. The "Graduates of Color" planning process underscored some of these needs.

Ramsay spoke to the desire for students to understand themselves in a way that they can navigate both the work force and the world. Our identities are part of that process including marginalization that has, at times, made the classroom experience itself difficult. The “Grads of Color” celebrations acknowledge those challenges in a historical context and our students’ navigation of those challenges. It’s important that we have not quite figured out to do this. It’s also important to remember that we are all part of this conversation, not just our students of color. Until we can acknowledge this and explore it further, we will not be able to have the meaningful dialogues to which we aspire.

Ramsay notes that our students come with a range of identities and histories. How do we develop new ways of meeting those intersections of identity, especially as these categories shift? Historically, campus MCS offices were created in response to moments of crisis (e.g. – the Civil Rights Movement). Our students are more removed from at least some of those moments. They also come from a generation in which there is more exposure to different perspectives. How do we capture that evolution in a way that meets where they are and where, as a culture, we’ve been?

An example from Ramsay: My family is from Panama. A relative raised in Panama always speaks to her in English, which he was raised to speak, as part of a generation that was not allowed to speak Spanish. But that’s not her story, her story is different, as in exposure to religious conflicts.

From Segawa: Some of the shortcomings in the conversations represented learning outcomes not being seen in our students. But even in trying to define those outcomes, the target is moving: e.g. – students with multiple identities and not knowing how to negotiate that multiplicity. In the “Grads of Color” conversation, Segawa wondered if we were imposing a 60s expectation on 21st century students or has it become much more complicated than that. How do we hit this moving target?

From Dasher: Programs do tend to arrive from earlier situations. From this perspective, the new mentorship/feedback model allows for more fluidity and response to it, but Dasher wondered, how do you avoid institutionalizing in turn those adjustments?

From Segawa: We have a community willing to support Ramsay’s work (faculty, staff, and students) with sensitivity. So it does not all have to fall on Ramsay. So, we can do this more hands-on, personal approach: we have the people to make this happen and the number of students whom we need to serve, at least in terms of students of color, is small.

Mann noted, on campus, a shift from bringing to Puget Sound students who traditionally didn’t go to college and the need to offer them additional academic support to a newer model, but wondered if there is still a problem in terms of remediation today? Are there achievement gap issues today? Mann sees them as pretty much having gone away. Also, if what we want to do is learn how to live in a multicultural society, what about the need to turn outward?

From his perspective, Segawa sees all of these elements as still in play. Majority culture students also feel they have not had diversity experience they anticipated. We still have students in need for academic support, students particularly marked by lower socio-economic status. All the old challenges are still there, but we also have new dynamics in terms of shifting forms of multicultural identity and globalization.

Alyssa Raymond noted that she enjoyed the “I am Puget Sound” experience as a first year student, but feels her sophomore year has not been at this same level of connection. Raymond mentioned, however, as a useful experience a recent Swope lecturer (Eboo Patel) who had spoke on being Muslim.

Stephanie Wood noted that she feels the campus is not very diverse and that others would second this perspective. We seem to be more open about talking about sexual identification than about race. Wood also noted the lack of follow-up to the "I Am Puget Sound" kind of event.

Peggy Burge asked about to what degree these topics come up in Wood's course work? Wood replied yes, they do, but not a lot, especially within the context of a homogenous classroom population.

Mann asked if students expect this dialogue in the classroom or in the dining hall?

Wood answered that it was not an expectation, but it would be nice to hear more discussion around diversity.

Ramsay noted that her hope is that we could get to a point where we are not reliant on the diversity in the room to continue a conversation. Her commitment to social justice asks her to speak up regardless of a particular room's population. The hope is that we can support all students in feeling empowered to speak to these issues around diversity.

Segawa mentioned that on the co-curricular side it is more hit and miss in terms of an ongoing process over the course of four years. How do we keep from the student of color being cast in the role of I'm going to teach my peers about race? What's that student's experience over four years as well?

Ramsay spoke to trying to find how to meet the many needs around these issues, about what we do to further these conversations after "I Am Puget Sound": regular dialogues; peer education teams that host monthly conversations as on racial humor (who can say what), mascots, etc.

Wood mentioned the difference between folks coming to conversations as opposed to taking these conversations to them, Greek groups in particular.

Ramsay underscored the need for both, giving examples of taking conversations to groups and inviting suggestions for areas that could be addressed together in the future.

Segawa: We are working on cohort models for student who would benefit from additional support prior to and once arriving at school. The "Grads of Color" process underscored how much is not known as well as what is what is known, including the need to better meld faculty and staff expertise. We have not figured out how to be synergistic about this, even though we have all the pieces at Puget Sound.

Mann raised the possibility of using activity units to encourage students to take the time to explore some of these issues. Proehl seconded that idea.

Ramsay noted that these initiatives take time.

Segawa suggested the relevance of today's discussion to conversations in general about the sophomore experience.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 5 p.m. by the committee's chair, Bruce Mann.

Respectfully Submitted –

Geoff Proehl