Student Relations Advisory Committee

Minutes of November 11, 2000

Members Present: Al Burdi (Chair), Marty Gold, Frank Cianciola, Taryn O'Leary, Richard Mayk, Margaret Terpenning, Colin Heitzmann, Gary Faerber, Karen Reiman-Sendi, Royster Harper

Guests: Bill Zeller, Dean Nelson, MSA Representatives.

Meeting opened by Chair Burdi. Congratulations extended to Royster Harper.

Presentation on University Housing:

Bill Zeller: Would like feedback from SRAC on progress and objectives of University Housing. Faculty, Academic Affairs, and SRAC could be of service in expanding housing into the future. Two surveys are done each year about housing: (1) a student satisfaction survey, and (2) more sophisticated survey, assessing the academic climate of University housing (especially with respect to first year students).

University Housing strives to create and maintain a full support system for students. National research projects have been used by housing to gather research on the quality of student interaction, student tutoring programs, discussion of racial issues, and student faculty interactions. Housing believes the residence halls should allow quality learning and academic support to take place within facilities.

About two thousand of the 5500 first year students last year participated in living/learning communities. These programs seem to be reaching their desired outcome. Students who lived in buildings that house living/learning communities, but did not participate in the community reported a high academic experience. Students in the program have informal relations with faculty outside of class. These faculty members have offices and classrooms inside the residence halls and allow students to work with faculty in non-traditional ways.

Housing is also moving on to new initiatives. A pilot program for health scholars will begin in the fall. Also, the movement from having living in professional staff to having graduate students as hall directors has shown good results. Housing is also actively discussing making renovations to all residence halls on campus, as well as the possibility of a new residence hall.
How can we (Housing) get faculty to interact with students outside the classroom?

A. Burdi: Suggests taking the next 15 minutes to discuss the presentation.

M. Gold: (Addressing Royster) How do we get faculty more involved in the life of undergraduates? How can this committee work on this problem. What would be the role of SRAC to you?

Royster: To gain a thorough understanding of what we are doing in housing, we are committed to faculty/student interaction. We are at a point when we needs to use the new residence halls to be very creative. What is the student perspective? How can we get faculty to be engaged in delivering a better experience?

A. Burdi: The whole experience should be more the sum of its parts. It is important to inform faculty of what opportunities are available for interaction with students.

MSA Treasurer: How do you intend to get faculty involved? Zeller: It is important to cultivate this experience without infringing too much on the lives of faculty.

C. Heitzmann: Notes that the biggest difference going from undergraduate to graduate education is that you realize that faculty are real people. As a graduate student, faculty members communicate with students on their own.

Royster: Suggests having Student Affairs provide dining opportunities where they supply the food to a faculty member. That faculty member will dine with several students. This provision by Student Affairs will remove the burden from the faculty member.

Zeller: Suggests assigning mentorship programs by hall. Also notes that living learning communities prepare successful sophomores.

A. Burdi: Feels younger students may look to older students for guidance. Are there ways to attract these upper level students back to live in living/learning communities.

R. Simpson: Feels worried about the faculty not having enough control over the sociological impact of calling the University a community. Hopefully, students come to this University to be stimulated by thinking and learning. Undergraduates do not want to be catered to by a phony experience. Faculty will not be attracted to programs by saying, "this will be a wonderful experience."

A. Burdi: This is part of the baggage of calling yourself a research university.

R. Mayk: Maybe faculty interaction with students isn't the main part of the students not in living/learning communities but in the same building reporting a higher academic experience.

Zeller: Many different factors of that need to be researched.
M. Gold: The intellectual atmosphere in University housing is very important. People not in living/learning communities, but in the same dorm, by chance, seem to benefit impressively well from the faculty influence. What are the possibilities of attracting more senior professors to these programs? Such professors could give a seminar in a dorm to student in that particular residence hall. What kind of incentives could be offered to attract these professors? Is it feasible that such faculty could give up so much time?

R. Simpson: To have faculty/student interaction go into a more social work scene is not the kind of environment the University should provide.

A. Burdi: In what ways has planning for students been kept up in comparison to actual housing building?

Zeller: The life sciences initiative is naturally linked to the dormitories around Palmer Field.

MSA President: Would be helpful for Mr. Simpson to share his positive student interaction experiences with other faculty.

M. Terpenning: Sometimes things grow when they are not paid for. Relationships between faculty and students can grow way beyond official programs, but ultimately these relationships grow out of official programs.

A. Burdi: Notes that there are more non-Medical School students on the Med School campus than actual Med School students.

MSA Treasurer: Many people come to Michigan for intellectual stimulation from those who perform at the top of their field. However, it seems the faculty treats the undergraduate students as a nuisance.

M. Gold: Any ideas on how this committee could work effectively to contribute to this issue?

A. Burdi: This could be a theme for our work this year (could include several small subgroups)

M. Gold: Extends a thank you to Bill Zeller for sharing his presentation with SRAC.

Royster: Really focusing on faculty interaction with students is very important. When faculty and students come together around something meaningful, all sorts of relationships develop.

A. Burdi: Requests a list of questions and perspectives on the Housing issue.
Royster: Due to the recent alcohol related death of a student, alcohol is a very important issue. One manifestation of students being on the margin is their outside of class activity. The broader issue is tied into the kind of relationships the students have.

M. Gold: Is this a second priority issue?

Royster: How life is experienced outside the class and some of that behavior could detract from the undergraduate experience.

M. Gold: The problem of drinking among young adults and intellectual stimulation are probably two separate issues. If this issue is a priority for this committee, then there should be organization so the issue can be addressed effectively.

A. Burdi: If there is a group working on alcohol related issues on campus, could there be a liaison between that group and SRAC? If we believe alcohol is here to stay, we should promote drinking responsibly.

R. Simpson: Emphasizes that it is important to bring students together to understand that alcohol can kill. Drinking is a big risk and students should care for one another.

M. Gold: An effective program would hold every member of the community responsibly for every other member of the community.

Al Burdi: Discussion to continue at the next SRAC meeting 12/08/00.

Meeting is called to a close.