Student Relations Advisory Committee
Minutes
December 12, 2008

Present: Simone Himbeault Taylor, Beverly Fauman, Annette Haines, Lynn Marko, Leo McAfee, David Potter, Susan Pritzel, Mark Tucker, Ian Margolis, Karin Teske (student support).

Guests: Susan Wilson, Asst. Dean of Students and Director, Student Activities and Leadership  
Erika Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of New Students Programs  
Anita Bohn, DSA Organizational Consultant  
Nathan Martin, Co-chair, Assoc. of Religious Counselors (ARC)  
Rolf Bouma, Co-chair, Assoc. of Religious Counselors (ARC)

11:57 Simone welcomed everyone to the last meeting of the year

Motion to approve November minutes granted

VPSA remarks: (Simone Taylor)

**Update on transfer student issues:**

guests Susan and Erika from SAL and office of new student programs

Over 1,200 students per year come in as transfer students; many come from out of state.

The Initiatives on campus

1) Transfer orientation- one day program required for new transfer students for MOST academic units- this is unique to Michigan as many other universities do not require transfer student orientation.

2) Two day transfer program for community college transfers over the summer before entering in the fall

3) Transfer mentorship program: LSA was lacking in this area so new initiative opened a transfer mentorship program for LSA students - mentorship programs already exist for other academic programs

4) New Student Organization founded  
   - launched in August 2008  
   - support network for transfer students

Jack Kent Cooke Initiatives: 4-year grant to recruit talented community college transfer students  
   - Grant managed by provost office  
   - Undergrad admissions receives large chunk  
   - Funding for 2 day summer orientation and mentorship program
More research needed on transfer students

1) Limited course availability (similar to situation faced by student athlete population)
   - lots of courses already taken by the time the transfers are accepted and matriculated:
2) Resident hall experience could be very valuable
   - some transfers move immediately off campus
     a. Housing options not terrific- many end up in Northwood (all options good options) but may be nice to cluster transfers together-not to make them a cohort-but because their needs are similar especially when they initially arrive on campus.

3) Post-orientation programming- there is a need to get information and messages to transfer students multiple times before it really sinks in. Continued programming would help do that.

Support for commuter students- some campuses have commuter student lounges, locker space that is not in a residence hall. This could be considered for UM.

**numbes of students who live on campus who are transfer students?**
  -no hard number but the number is very small compared to transfers who live off campus
  - about half live off campus within walking distance of campus
  -the other half live within short drive (despite driving they are not considered commuters unless they live farther away such as in another city)

  **why are commuters living off? b/c of selection? Cost?**
  Housing is Ypsilanti may be cheaper; many transfers are supporting themselves and paying their way through college. A co-op is an off-campus housing option that gives students an opportunity to get to know people.

Simone thanked guests for the update on transfer student issues.

**RELIIGOUSLY INVOLVED STUDENT PANEL:**

Anita Bohn has brought together a group of religiously involved students

Anita introduced Rabbi Nathan Martin from Hillel- co chair of ARC, as well as 4 religiously involved students

Key points:
  - important for students to have home away from home when religion and ethnicity is a big part of identity
  -religious involvement creates environment for students to feel welcome
  - become involved in mid-week activities
- get involved in leadership activities

Challenges: getting students to become involved with their religion in the absence of pressure from their parents during the transition to college

**Christian Student Life: Student Perspective**

- **Catholic:** St. Mary’s - an important place to make friends
  - Challenge: recognize and accept different views; conservative vs. liberal catholicism

- **Protestant:** Lutheran Campus Ministry - great way to get involved
  - Challenge: sometimes difficult to get students to participate in their religion when away from family pressures.

**Jewish Student Life: Student Perspective**

Hillel one of 3 Jewish centers at Umich - Hillel, Habad house, Jewish resource center

(Two latter more aimed at Jewish outreach trying to make Jewish students aware of their religious backgrounds)

Hillel – more pluralistic, resource for Jewish students on campus
- personally important walking into enormous public secular university
- important to reaffirm Jewish identity and that was made possible thru involvement with Hillel - Hillel is fully staffed; staff does a good job letting students get involved in leadership positions - religious, political, social, cultural, positions to enhance student life - specifically religious life
  - prayer group communities - orthodox, reform, conservative, and moderate
- a lot of other universities one sector will dominate Jewish life but at UMICH every sect has a say in what goes on

Challenge: religious observances and class schedules
  - Hillel is a great resource for when tests scheduled on religious holiday - easier to make accommodations with faculty because of Hillel’s support
  - Hillel good source of support in facing any discrimination

**Muslim Student Life: Student Perspective**

- such a central part of your life, not just something you do but something you live by
- Muslim Student Association has been supportive
  - one of the largest Muslim Student Associations in the country
  - offer many services like Friday sermons for students who cannot attend at mosque
  - weekly Koran classes
  - great to have community thru which to practice religion in college
Challenge- lack of a central building or center on campus
- no place to congregate on campus for daily prayers
- room booking conflicts
- mosque by north campus is a drive or bus ride away
- not as much interaction between campus Muslims and broader Muslim community

Religious Pluralism:
Children of Abraham
Began last year as a partnership between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish students as a service project effort to collect medical supplies to send to Tanzania.
- seeing blossoming of religious pluralism, something which the U takes pride in
- more interaction between groups needed
- diversity may be present but lack of pluralism on broad and continuous scale
- great to have opportunity to spend thousands of hours working with students of various religious backgrounds

Additional strengthening between Hillel and MSA and St. Mary’s

Alternative Spring Break Trips
- allow for additional interfaith interaction to establish new bonds and friendships
- much interest in promoting this type of opportunity for interfaith interaction around campus

Religious Centers on Campus:

Association of Religious Counselors:
ARC- gathers folks who are religious professionals who then work with students
Student communities and religious groups tend to be isolated
- want to create framework to engage others despite disagreements
ARC- 80 religious organization around Michigan
- many with professional staff representation
  - Hillel represents great portion of Jewish community
  - no corresponding entity to Christian community
  - St. Mary’s represents catholic umbrella which is the closest thing
  - The rest of the Christian community is fragmented
  - Staff tend to function individually, collaboration is a struggle

Other concerns: ARC seen as adjunct of student affairs
- works a lot with students
- Try to work with U (no religious student MAJOR PROGRAM, just COURSES)
- Tried to get more involved in academic side of U, as well as where U intersects with society and ultimate questions
ARC meets monthly, glue to hold religious organizations together and to stay connected to students

Simone thanked guests and opened floor for questions

**what is official status of ARC in connection with the University of Michigan?**

ARC separate from the University- U recognizes importance to give students access to religious counselors in crisis but also supportive basis- arrangement between ARC and student affairs- ARC gets some benefits to plug in to U community in easy way (email account, residents hall visits) ARC agrees to respect policies and pluralistic approach from the university. If ARC member not respecting boundaries, that will not be tolerated, ARC as gatekeeper.

**What is the situation with religious stances on the diag?**

People who do not respect pluralistic nature are not appropriate, but we respect right of everyone to express their opinion (diag is sacred space to do that)

- Most groups on the diag are not affiliated with the University
- Most who show up are unannounced and from out of town
- Leaves ARC ministers to clean up the mess
- Most members of ARC feel tragedy to rant on the diag

**Groups on the diag are offensive and sometimes harassing**

- not just preaching in general but harassing and provoking
- these demonstrations create atmosphere of bringing out the worst of student responses
- creates terrible dynamic on all accounts
- one of the worst aspects of free speech
- - feelings of safety and security compromised
- - free speech infringes on others free speech

A Campus with healthy religiously pluralistic culture is great to engage and discuss differences and connections, so that when it gets external forces dumping in hateful speech, there is a way that the community can not be on defensive, but absorb it by supporting each other; multi-faith coalition and additional conversations for after an event to process what was said (ARC vision of what we’d like to see)

- right now we’re stuck when someone wants to jump on diag
- left without resources as a community of how to work with that

*Conservatives liberal; what it means to Catholic and Jewish view*

*Do terms mean the same thing for both religions?*
There are similarities: Strictness of practice: level of continuity with ancient practices: can become politically intertwined. For some its worship style- ranges from traditional hymns, organ, to rock band poppy style.

Beyond student groups is there the opportunity for dialog?

(response from student panel) In some places dialog is healthfully there- religion class always had openness to dialog, and outside specific religious classes, always open for dialog. Some classes the professors are more open than others. It is sometimes harder to talk to people who think religion is a childish thing to ascribe to

How many students identify with religion?

hard to tell because optional survey during registration, ‘do you identify with religion?’ About 20% of students check a box; It is difficult to extrapolate a number from that.

To Student Panel: Do you wish you could have lived together with people of your own faith?

-no, came to a public university for a broad experience; but glad a community there for support

-yes, I would have liked that experience; MSA does have a service to hook up students to live with each other- I didn’t know about it before I got involved, would have been nice to access resource easier

Suggestions: (from student panel)

-have Muslim Student Association work more with publicizing housing service to link Muslim roommates together; reflection rooms are great but sometimes lacking in heavy traffic areas of campus

-expansion of the role of ombudsman- religious conflict with class- ombudsman one of most understanding people - only knew of ombudsman b/c of information from Hillel.

-Empower ombudsman and expand role- not an advocate and not supposed to be, but for situations run into, want someone hired by university who knows beaurocratic red tape and more credibility with U to work out class conflicts

Did you find in dealing with those scheduling issues you had resolution?-

No:

- miscommunication in one situation resulting in the need to drop a class but other situations have been accommodated adequately.

-There is no Muslim counselor of ARC or Muslim center to begin with to present counselor; MSA working with mosque and with board interested to contributing to student life on campus and will work to getting a Muslim representative for ARC.

Simone thanked everyone.
Movement to adjourn; seconded

Meeting was adjourned at 1:13pm

Submitted By:

Karin Teske
SACUA Student Support