

**Alfred University Parents Association
Annual Meeting
September 25, 2010**

Minutes

Call to Order

Parents Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. There were approximately 30 people in attendance. Members of the AU administration included Provost Bill Hall; Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Katie welcomed everyone and then introduced Provost Hall.

Provost's Remarks

Provost Hall welcomed everyone, thanked them for attending the meeting and explained how much the University values their feedback. He also thanked the parents for entrusting the University with their children. The University is charged with providing an environment in which our students can reach their highest potential and that is a responsibility we take very seriously. For most students, these four years are probably the only time in their lives when they can devote so much time focusing on the life of the mind. Provost Hall explained that he has been at the University for 30 years and things have changed a lot since then, but one thing that hasn't changed is the value we place on supporting community. Students learn things here that can change the course of their lives. We encourage students to take a wide variety of different courses so they can consider and see what the world has to offer. It is important to take courses outside their discipline. To illustrate this point, he told about an alumnus he recently met at an AU alumni event. This gentleman told the Provost that a course he took from him changed his life's direction. He had planned to be an engineer, but after taking Dr. Hall's Criminal Justice course, he decided to alter his career plans, and is now a successful lawyer.

Here at AU there is also great emphasis placed upon providing support in a challenging environment. Provost Hall recalled another former student who took his Introduction to Sociology course. At the end of the course, the student could have received a D or even an F, but Provost Hall instead gave him an incomplete and told him he had to work for 2 more months, during the summer, to finish the course. It was rigorous, but the student completed the work and passed. Many years later that student told the Provost that, as a result of that experience, he realized there are people in this world who will not accept mediocrity. This gave him a good foundation for later educational pursuits and success in his career.

The challenges we provide here help students find out who they are and discover what they are capable of learning and doing.

The Provost closed by encouraging the parents to let us know if they have questions or concerns. If the concerns relate to academics, they can contact him or the appropriate dean. We all work together to try to make their student's experience here as good and it can be.

Katie thanked the Provost and then introduced Vice President Kathy Woughter.

Student Affairs Update

Kathy expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak to the group and asked how many in the room were parents of first-year students. About 90% of the group raised their hands. She thanked them for choosing Alfred University and said that this year's entering class was larger than usual. In fact, there were about 60 students more than last year. Given this, she and her staff met over the summer to plan out how they would accommodate the additional students while also providing them with as great a first-year experience as students have had in the past. They wondered if they would be facing more problems, given the larger group of students. A lot of thought and preparation went into this and contingency plans were developed. What they found out, however, is that there aren't proportionately more problems, in fact not even as many incidents as last year. The students are engaged, polite, enthusiastic, and eager to participate and get involved in programs and activities.

They had a great opening this year and things went pretty smoothly. The residence halls are full. This is great for community, but means it is a little more difficult for students who wish to change rooms. If there is an unsafe environment or a medical issue involved, they are able to move students, but options are more limited. RAs have roommates, where normally they would be in single rooms, and some new students have been moved into upper-class halls. It's a little harder to make switches, but if a student has an important reason for being out of the room, they should speak with their RA about options.

Kathy recalled that last year the major issue of concern was the H1N1 epidemic. This year that is no longer a big issue, but the new health concern to plan for is bed bugs. We don't have a bed bug infestation yet, but it may happen and plans are being put in place to deal with it. Other schools across the country have been facing this problem.

Q: Are there going to be an additional flu shot clinics?

A: We had one on campus recently, and there will be more coming as the flu season approaches.

Next weekend is Homecoming and the Saxon Athletic Hall of Fame Dinner. There will be an exciting announcement made about a new campaign. More information will be forthcoming.

Students in Openhym have the opportunity to become involved in the Drawn to Diversity Living-Learning Community. Each week a faculty member meets with a group of students and gives them a challenge. They have to find a way to creatively approach the challenge. Recently they did a project about 9/11 called "When My Teacher Told Me." These students were in fourth, fifth or sixth grade when they were informed of the 9/11 attacks. So they set up classroom desks along Academic Alley and asked students to write down thoughts, draw pictures, etc. relating back to the time when their teachers broke the news to them. If your student lives in Openhym, please encourage them to get involved in this great program.

Recently we held a Service & Leadership Fair for the students. It was well-attended. A lot of first-year students participated. This is really a great class. The class has brought all the benefits we hoped for and very few of the negative aspects that might have been expected with such a large class.

Kathy also announced that a group of marketing students is conducting a survey to see how satisfied students and parents were with the new student check-in process. She handed out some of the surveys and asked parents to please fill them out and return them to her.

Association President's Report

Katie reported that the Parents Advisory Board met earlier in the morning. Here at AU parents have many opportunities to meet with members of the AU administration, faculty and staff.

She reported that the new *Parent Handbook* has been published and is also available on-line. It contains a lot of helpful information. She also encouraged parents to sign up for the AU E-newsletter. To sign up for Alfred E-News all you need to do is send an email message to enews@alfred.edu.

In August, we held a special Parents Orientation Program for the parents of first-year football players. This is the first time the University has had a special program just for them. It went very well and the parents seemed to appreciate and benefit from it.

Also new this year was the addition of our Parents Association Welcome Table at New Student Check-in. Katie thanked Ken Dahlgren and Vicky McDonough for their help at that table and at Parents Orientation later that same day. We enjoyed greeting all the new parents and providing them with a Parent Handbook and information about the Parents Association.

Katie mentioned that the University is very good at responding to our questions, so if anyone has any concerns, please let someone know.

There is another family weekend in the spring and it includes Hot Dog Day. Hot Dog Day is a lot of fun. Art students sell their wares, you can buy hot dogs, there's a parade, live music, rides, and lots of other things to see and do. Melody mentioned that there is a Hot Dog Day video available on YouTube. To view it, just go to www.youtube.com/ and type *Hot Dog Day in Alfred New York* in the search box.

The AU-Parent-to-Parent Google Group is also a great way to get questions answered. Members of the Parents Advisory Board assist with that and some AU administrators also monitor it and jump in to answer questions when needed. Lots of parents are participating in the group and conversations are continuing. Last year there were a lot of questions about advisement and course registration, this year conversations are about getting rides home, the differences between sons and daughters and how often they communicate with their parents, etc. Katie encouraged everyone to join, if they haven't already. To sign up just contact Jodi Bailey at baileyj@alfred.edu.

Katie reminded everyone to sign up for the NY-Alert system, if they haven't already done so. To provide your email to be added to the list for this, just send it to communications@alfred.edu.

Open Discussion

Q: How does the advisement work for students who need to register for courses during the spring semester? Is there a specific time when the advisors contact the students? How available are the advisors?

A: There is an "advisement week" that takes place the week before spring course registration begins. The dates are indicated in the Academic Calendar (on page 20 of the *Parent Handbook* and also available online at www.alfred.edu/academic_calendar/.) This semester advisement week is October 25-29, and registration for the spring semester begins November 1st. Advisors are available to assist the students. If an advisor is away at that time, another faculty member will step in to assist.

Q: What happens during Siblings Weekend and how is it handled?

A: Siblings Weekend is administered through the Student Activities Office. Current students are provided with information about the weekend for them to pass along to their siblings. The weekend includes activities and programs that are suitable for all ages. Siblings usually stay in the residence hall room with the student – often the roommate volunteers to stay in another room that night. One parent commented that her daughter has come every year for Siblings Weekend. She stays with her brother in his room, while his roommate stays somewhere else. She brings her sleeping bag. This year, Siblings Weekend will take place November 5-7.

Q: How do students find rides home for breaks?

A: Most students use the ride board which they can access through my.alfred.edu. Information about this is found at www.my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/info.getting_to_and_from.cfm. They just need to scroll down to where they can read the information about ride sharing. Many students also find rides through Face Book.

Comment: Even if students aren't from exactly the same area, they can still benefit from a ride. Parents can meet the student somewhere along the way and may save many hours of driving.

Comment: Students who can give rides should be encouraged to post information on the ride board.

Q: Can parents access the ride board?

A: Only if their student gives them their username and password.

Q: Can the University provide parents with the names of students who live in their areas?

A: We will look into this, but it probably isn't possible due to privacy laws. (Update: Melody checked with the Registrar, and he confirmed that personal information about students or parents *cannot* be provided to anyone off-campus.)

Q: Is there a bus service to and from Alfred?

A: Yes. There is information about this on the transportation webpage, along with information about the shuttles to and from the airports. www.my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/info.getting_to_and_from.cfm

Q: During vacations, such as fall break, do the residence halls remain open?

A: During some of the breaks the halls stay open, but not all. For example, during winter break the buildings are closed down. If students have to stay on campus during spring break, they have to pay extra. [Update: Kathy checked with Residence Life and confirmed that the Residence Halls *are* open during fall break. Dining halls are also open on those days, though some services (counseling center, for example) are not. If there are any questions about when halls close for the other breaks, parents are welcome to call Residence Life directly at 607-871-2186.]

Q: What about work study students? Are they expected to work during breaks?

A: There may be some that do, depending upon the kind of work involved, but most don't, and none would be expected to work during the winter break.

Q: Does AU use Face Book to advertise?

A: Yes, and also Twitter.

Q: Honors Convocation is a very long program, with many divisions represented. Has the University considered splitting it up into smaller groups and connecting them electronically so they can see and hear the people who need to speak to all of them?

A: Changing the current configuration would involve working with a large number of people who make that program happen and getting them to agree that having separate, smaller ceremonies would work better. The University works on a shared governance process. Because the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is so large, it would be much more difficult to split that out, but the Provost is talking with other faculty about this. He is hoping to move this idea forward in some form, but it will depend upon getting agreement from all involved. The College of Business had their own, smaller honors ceremony last spring, but they also participated in the larger Honors Convocation.

Q: How open are advisors to speaking with parents about their students?

A: Katie is on the faculty at SUNY Geneseo. She responded that she prefers to speak directly with her advisees. If parents call her, she tells them this. The Provost responded that, here at AU, it depends upon the advisor and the academic unit. FERPA regulations require students to sign off on this first. If they have signed a waiver saying we can speak with their parents about their academic progress, then the advisor can *legally* talk with the parents. Some will and some will not. More often than not, the advisors will listen to the parent but say they prefer to talk directly with the student. Students need to learn to work through these things themselves as part of their growth process. This is all part of the "challenge in a supportive environment" that the University emphasizes. Katie suggested that parents should encourage their students to be proactive in contacting their advisors.

Comment: One parent commented that his son registered for classes on-line, but it was very challenging because he is not computer savvy. He realizes, however, that he needs to develop those skills. It's good to know that the advisors will be assisting the students to register for the spring semester.

The Provost responded that advisors will help, but other faculty can also help and all divisions have other people to assist and walk students through the process. Students shouldn't be afraid to ask for guidance if they need it.

Q: Does a student's advisor stay with that student all four years, or change?

A: They can change. For example, in Liberal Arts and Sciences, when the student picks or changes his/her major, their advisor might also change. In the College of Business, however, they may stay the same. In Art & Design they have an Associate Dean who works closely with the first-year students. There are also three faculty who advise the students during their freshman and sophomore years. Then, when they are juniors, they get an advisor in their area of concentration. Melody mentioned that the Associate Dean in Art & Design, Robin Howard, would be one of the presenters at the "First-year Academic Expectations" Information Session, following our meeting. She recommended that anyone with questions about Art & Design advising should attend and ask Robin. Parents of students in other areas of the University are also encouraged to go and ask these questions of the other panelists – Dean Mary McGee (LAS), Dr. Steve Pilgrim (CEMS) and Ms. Theresa Gunn (College of Business).

Q: Is it possible for parents to receive financial communications from the University, rather than having emails sent just to the students? Sometimes the students don't, or can't, check their A.U. email regularly, sometimes they don't provide the information to their parents in a timely manner, and sometimes they even inadvertently delete very important messages from the University. This is particularly problematic when the email is a notification that they have a bill outstanding in CashNet. Once the student is on campus and can sign the parent up as an authorized user, then the parent can access CashNet, but there is a gap between the time the deposit is paid and the student arrives on campus when vital information is being emailed only to the student.

A: Melody said she would check with the person in charge of Student Accounts on this.

Comment: One parent indicated his daughter was away all summer working as a camp counselor. She wasn't able to check her email regularly.

Comment: Perhaps it should be part of the application process to get the parents email address so it can be added to the student record right away. Then, perhaps any communications about bills could be copied to the parent's email. If there is someplace students can check a box indicating they authorize their parents to get this information, it should be big and bold, so they don't miss it.

Comment: These kids are just seniors in high school at the time they apply to Alfred. They are not yet adults. Parents need to be kept in the loop.

Comment: In one case the immunization form was overlooked. Notifications about this "missing piece" were sent only to the student, not the parent. The student didn't check her AU email, so she ended up being blocked from registering for classes. It would have been better if those messages had been copied to the parent. Any email reminders should go to both.

Comment: Under the old system, there used to be a paper bill sent to the parents in the mail. Now that the University is using CashNet, the student can authorize the parent to get notification, but that seems to only happen after the student is here. There is a gap that needs to be addressed. Lots of students do not check their AU email regularly before they get here.

Comment: It would help if parents could be mailed a schedule telling when the bills will come out and when the payments are due.

Follow-up: Melody discussed this issue with Deb Votava, the Assistant Controller/Bursar. Ms. Votava thanked the parents for this helpful feedback. She is now considering the possibility of doing a special mailing to incoming first-year students each year – to their home addresses – with a detailed explanation of CashNet, stressing the importance of setting up an authorized user (parent), and including instructions about how to go about doing that. She said she realizes that the CashNet information normally included in the welcome packet from Admissions could be overlooked. Sending a special, separate mailing dealing with student accounts, bills, and CashNet, may help clear things up and alleviate some of the problems expressed in our meeting.

Comment: It seems like the student accounts in CashNet aren't updated very often, so it is hard to tell how much parents actually owe.

Follow-up: Ms. Votava indicated that they post payments right away, but the next bill isn't published to the CashNet system for a while, depending upon what time of year it is, and how much is still owed. CashNet is upgrading all the time, though, so hopefully it will improve. She is thinking of ways to make the system work better for everyone.

Comment: When parents call the University, the staff members are very helpful. Sometimes it is just better to talk with someone, rather than using the computer.

Q: It parents do not wish to pay online, and would rather receive a bill and pay by check, can they do this?

A: Another parent said they have paid by check and it wasn't a problem. Melody said she would look into this further.

Follow-up: Melody asked Ms. Votava this question. She said that understands some people are concerned about making payments on-line, although she is confident that our system is secure and all information would remain confidential. She said that the University will *always* take payments through the U.S. Mail and in person, in addition to allowing students and parents to make payments through our secure billing and payment system.

Although they discourage paper bills, since it's so easy and available for a student and/or parent to access the information on-line, they *do have* a paper bill approval form in the Student Service Center in Seidlin Hall that the student can stop in and fill out.

Adjournment

Katie thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting at 11:40 a.m. Our next Annual Meeting will take place Saturday, September 17, 2011.