

**Alfred University Parents Association
Annual Meeting
September 26, 2009**

Minutes

Call to Order

Parents Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. There were approximately 30 people in attendance. Members of the AU administration included President Charles Edmondson; Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; Stan Colla, Vice President for University Relations; Nancy Evangelista, Associate Provost; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Katie welcomed everyone and then introduced President Edmondson.

President Edmondson's Remarks

President Edmondson welcomed the parents thanked them for entrusting the University with their children. We are charged with providing an environment in which our students can reach their highest potential and that is a responsibility we take very seriously. AU is different from some larger Universities where students seem to have access to faculty only during classes, but have difficulty trying to meet with them outside of class. Our faculty are much more accessible, and our Student Affairs Division is very special, different from many other schools – with staff members who work hard to make the experience outside of class enriching and one that offers numerous opportunities for students to get involved. Here at AU we worry about your children almost as much as you do, and realize the campus experience for 18-22 year olds is very unique; it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The President concluded by thanking the parents for their interest and for sending their children to Alfred University.

Katie asked how many attending the meeting were parents of first-year students. The majority raised their hands. She explained that here at AU, we, as parents, are fortunate to have this opportunity to connect with administrators. That isn't the case at many schools. She then introduced Vice President Kathy Woughter.

Student Affairs Update

Kathy expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak to the group and reported that this fall semester opening was great – the best she can remember. She hasn't yet been awakened by any emergency calls in the middle of the night. Orientation went smoothly. If anyone has any suggestions about Orientation, please contact her via email at studentaffairs@alfred.edu.

So far, all reports are positive. This first-year class is phenomenal, really outstanding. They are engaged, participating, joining clubs and organizations, signing up for leadership development programs and, in general, showing a great interest in getting involved. Many student organizations have doubled in size because so many first-year students have joined.

Kathy stated that she recently asked members of her student advisory council to tell her how the recession has affected them and their families. She got some very heart-felt responses. Students are more stressed out than usual, need to work more hours, and some are coping with the added stress of parents losing their jobs. Some have said that they understand the sacrifice it took for their parents to send them here and they're not going to waste a minute of that opportunity.

Ann's House is now open and provides upper-class housing for 46 students. The rooms are all singles, with two rooms sharing a bathroom. We are also looking forward to the opening of the Miller expansion – Miller II, which should be open on a limited basis in the spring, and ready for full scale use in the fall.

There have been some questions about the University's Pandemic Planning Process. In August, a letter was sent to all parents, informing them about preparations the University has undertaken to manage influenza and influenza-like-illness on campus, and asking them to discuss a list of flu preparation and prevention recommendations with their sons and daughters. The University's plans incorporate the guidelines provided by the Center for Disease Control for Institutions of Higher Education and we are working closely with the New York State and the Allegany County Health Departments to monitor flu conditions. Updates will be provided on the AU Health Services website (<http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/csrc.SeasonalandH1N1SwineFluUpdate.cfm>), but if any questions arise, please feel free to contact Pam Schu at the Health Center (607-871-2400).

We had a seasonal flu shot clinic and are applying for more of that vaccine. We've also applied to the Department of Health for the H1N1 vaccine, but are not sure yet when or if we will get it.

Students are concerned, with all they've been hearing about H1N1, and some are showing up at the Health Center with a little sore throat, wondering if they have the flu. So, now, when students request an appointment, they receive an emailed list of symptoms and a check list to help them understand if they have H1N1. We've also purchased a supply of thermometers with disposable sleeves for campus residences, so students can determine whether or not they have a fever.

We are working diligently to get information out to students about the flu and how to avoid getting it and spreading it. Student peer educators are going into residence halls, talking to students, making up bulletin boards, posters, etc. about the flu. Our food service vendor is willing to deliver food to students who are isolated due to illness. For food delivery students should let their RAs know they are sick and are staying in their rooms and need to have meals delivered.

Over the summer the Counseling and Health Centers merged into one administrative unit – the Wellness Center (incorporating Health Care, Counseling and Wellness Education). Dr. Cathie Chester is overseeing this unit. This new model is working really well so far and there have been no complaints. Kathy asked the parents to let her know if they hear about any issues that need to be addressed.

The Saxon Bike Hub, which is the new student operated University bike lending program, is going well and is very popular. There are twenty bikes available. If you see students riding around campus this weekend on bikes with purple and gold water bottle holders, those are AU bikes.

Katie then introduced Nancy Evangelista and asked her to provide additional information on the academic policy relating to the flu and also a new academic testing program scheduled to be launched this fall.

Associate Provost Report

Associate Provost Nancy Evangelista reported that we have an academic policy in place to address the issue of class attendance. We are encouraging ill students to stay in their residence hall rooms or go home to manage symptoms while they are sick. We don't want ill students mixing with well students and spreading the virus. All faculty recently received a memo letting them know that students must be made to feel comfortable staying home, or in their residence halls, if they are ill. We don't want to stress attendance in class as more important than the health of the students, so faculty have been asked to be flexible and accommodating, letting the ill students make up class work, assigning note takers, if necessary, etc. Our goal is to keep the University running as smoothly as possible and accommodate the needs of ill students.

University is embarking on a new program this fall to assess student skills in the areas of critical thinking and writing. As an academic community, it is important for faculty and staff to know what students are actually learning. In higher education we need to define what our student learning goals are and determine if we're meeting those goals. We need to ask ourselves what skill sets we want all students to have across the board.

In an effort to inform ourselves better, we are focusing on two phases of assessment. The first phase, which is ongoing, involves all academic units defining what their student learning goals are and determining how they will measure them. The second phase, which we are starting now, is to learn more about how our students perform in the general education areas of writing/essay and critical thinking skills in comparison with peer institutions, and to gauge growth in those students. Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) standardized tests will be administered to all first-year students and seniors. This information will help us assess the students' skill levels and see how we compare to other colleges and universities. The goal of our assessment process is to see what we need to do to improve, to assess ourselves and our effectiveness. It is important to note that these tests won't count toward the students' grades or affect their ability to graduate. These tests will be administered on a cyclical basis – in three years we'll do it again and have pre and post-test data to measure growth. These are similar to the achievement tests used in public schools. We can set our own benchmarks and decide what we want to do with the information.

Katie then introduced Stan Colla, Vice President for University Relations and asked him to provide information about parent fundraising.

Remarks from the Vice President of University Relations

Stan Colla explained that he spoke with the Parents Advisory Board members at their earlier meeting and the topic of the conversation was parents being contacted by our Phonathon callers, soliciting gifts for the Annual Fund. He is sensitive to the parents' feelings about this and understands that an AU education is expensive. Because The University is a not-for-profit institution, however, we depend on the Annual Fund to help us meet our annual budget. The money raised targets the students' experience this current year. Full tuition doesn't cover the entire cost of educating the students. Tuition covers five-sixths of the cost for the students' education; the other sixth comes from others. The Annual Fund helps us handle unexpected costs like a spike in oil prices. It helps us augment our budget to cover those kinds of expenses or to take advantage of opportunities that come along. It's okay to say no. Some parents have the financial where-with-all to make gifts and are willing to do so. It is also important to educate our students about philanthropy so they will understand how philanthropy plays an important part in making private education in America possible. These students will be solicited as alumni after they graduate, and we hope they realize the importance of supporting their alma mater.

Parents Advisory Board Update

Katie reported that the AU Parent-to-Parent Google Group has been very successful. Through it some parents made friends with other parents. The Group was created to help parents of first-year students connect with each other and with members of the Parents Advisory Board. The Group currently has 99 members and, since April, 127 topics have been discussed and 975 messages have been posted.

We thought interest in the Google Group would wane in September, but it is still active so we're continuing it. A new Google Group will be formed in the spring for parents of new accepted students.

Comment: It would be helpful to have links available on the Google Group page for parents to go to for more information. Melody said she would work on getting a list of helpful links added to the page.

Katie went on to report that Parents Orientation went well. She thanked all who attended. She also stressed the importance of parents encouraging their students to be advocates for themselves. It is important for students to ask questions, meet with their academic advisors, or talk with someone in the dean's office or another faculty member.

All faculty, staff and administrators here are very accessible. If your student tries and still has questions – tell them not to give up, but to keep trying to get answers. This is a learning process and helps them mature. Self-advocacy is an important skill for them to acquire as part of the transition to adulthood.

Q: Orientation for students was great, but there wasn't enough residence hall corridor camaraderie promoted. Some shy students have trouble making friends, could there be more corridor activities i.e. pizza party, popcorn get-togethers, etc.? This is especially important during the first month. There are full dorm activities, but not corridor activities.

A: Kathy said she will look into this.

Q: Does anyone have any tips for teaching self-advocacy to our children? What can parents do to try to foster this, especially in shyer students?

A: Katie said that she does research on who to call to answer a question or address a problem and then suggests her son call that person. It is important to know they can ask other faculty, not just their academic advisor. It is good to get to know other faculty and build a rapport with them.

Nancy Evangelista added that there are Freshman Seminar programs – Liberal Arts and Sciences has structured courses in content areas for first-year students and they have a peer mentor (sophomore or junior) to assist them. She suggests that when students get to the point where they begin to show more independence and want to handle things on their own – their parents should embrace that. It may seem easier to just do things for them, but it is important to give the student the opportunity to do it on his or her own, or at least make an attempt. If your son or daughter comes to you with a question or problem you could ask them “Who do you think you can go to for an answer to this question? Remember their faculty advisor is always a go-to person, and RAs and RDs are also trained to help students.

Q: When at dinner with her son and one of his friends (both first-year students) one of the parents asked what their plans were for the spring semester – what courses will they take? Neither one had a clue as to what they needed to take or what courses they want to register for. When will the students be provided with this information?

A: Faculty advisors will contact their students about advisement week and the registration period for the spring semester. They will tell the students to contact them to schedule an appointment. During those appointments the advisors walk the students through the process and assist them in choosing the courses they should register for. The students cannot register unless they meet with their advisors and get a PIN number from them.

Once the students get through their first year it gets easier. Registration is done based upon the number of credit hours they have, so it is easier to get into courses when they are sophomores, juniors and seniors.

Comment – Some new students encountered problems when trying to register for fall classes in Banner. Having to register over the summer for the first semester can be very challenging. An older son, at another school, had orientation earlier, in the summer, and registered then with the help of his advisor – that worked out much better.

Comment: It would help if advisors call their new advisees over the summer to help them register. Parents are not aware of what courses the students should register for. Would it be possible to see a typical first semester schedule for each major?

Nancy said she will look into how the University might communicate better with first-year students and parents to make this process run more smoothly.

Q: If a student is in a class they don't like and don't do well in, what can they do?

A: They can drop or withdraw from the course. The drop period is short, but if they miss that deadline, they can withdraw later on, if they need to. A 'W' shows up on their transcript, and some students worry about this, but it is better to have a 'W' than a 'D'.

Q: How many hours are considered a full load? Is there a different price for tuition if fewer credits are taken?

A: There is a flat tuition fee for 12-18 hours. Twelve hours or more is considered a full load.

Many students change their minds once they get here and decide to change their majors. There are ways they can pick themselves up and get into the right curriculum.

Nancy explained that we have a student alert system in place to find out about and help students who are at risk. If a faculty member is concerned about a student not coming to class, or exhibiting behavior that puts them at risk, they can follow the student alert system. There is a committee that works together on this. If necessary, someone will go knock on the student's door to check on them. We reach out to help them, so no one slips through the cracks.

Q: The curriculum for Art & Design first-year students is pretty much set. Will that continue after the first year? What if an art student wants to take other courses?

A: During the first year, all art students take Freshman Foundations. Some students may find that constricting, but it is an important part of the program and for the first year all art students take it. There's more flexibility in subsequent years.

Thanks to everyone for coming. The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

10-5-09/ mhm