

Alfred University Parents Association
Advisory Board Meeting
April 26, 2014
Minutes

Call to Order

Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. Other members present were Susan and Bill Arduino, Allison Bishop-White, Marianne Tolomeo Gioni and Steve Lassman. Also attending was prospective member Nancy Schmeichel. University administrators present were: Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; Andrea Burch, Director of the Center for Academic Success; Mark McFadden, Director of the Career Development Center; Marcy Bradley, AU Bookstore Manager; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Katie welcomed everyone and asked all to introduce themselves. She then reported that the AU Parent2Parent Yahoo group has been very active with several new members joining and asking questions about move-in, meal plans, residence halls, and other topics, but, otherwise it has been a fairly quiet semester.

Katie then introduced Mark McFadden, Director of the Career Development Center.

Career Development Center (CDC) Presentation

Mark McFadden told us that the mission of the CDC is for every student to leave AU with a good resume, cover letter, interview skills, networking skills and job search skills. Service and experiential education opportunities are also very important. He stresses, when speaking with prospective students and first-year students, that they should visit the Career Development Center early and often, so they can learn about resources, options, and what they need to have in place to do an effective job search.

The CDC has had several great events this past year, including a fall career fair and a graduate student fair. The spring job fair (with a big emphasis on internships) and the networking/etiquette dinner were also very successful. They also did a virtual job fair and took students off campus to a teacher recruitment day and a law school event in Rochester.

Mark handed out an outcomes report from 2012, which also includes statistics going back 5 years. They are still getting responses from the class of 2013, but at this point the response rate is 50%. Of those, 42% are enrolled in graduate school, 60% are employed (and approx.. 2-3% are in both categories). 3% are looking for work, 2% are out of work and 3% are doing freelance work or indicate that they are self-employed.

The CDC offers one-on-one counseling appointments in addition to the career fairs and other services. They want to see students early and often. (Some first-year students get internships their first summer). He handed out the CDC suggested four-year plan for students. This plan is just a guideline, but can be helpful to parents and students so they realize they should begin the process early.

The CDC makes extensive use of resources, like the Careership program to which they subscribe. Careership is a job, company, contact information aggregator. It is a great resource for doing pre-interview research on a company or an individual with whom a student might be interviewing. They also use Linked In, which is helpful for networking, exploring careers and checking out potential contacts.

They advocate a multi-pronged approach to the job search – students need to find out what companies they would like to work in, determine what jobs are available, apply for those jobs, and do networking to find contacts in those companies who might help them get an interview.

Mark then told the group that there will be an Open House up in the Career Development Center in the Steinheim today beginning at 11:00 a.m. All are welcome and he would be happy to answer questions at that time.

Q: Which students are targeted for the Graduate School Fair? Is it just seniors, or do you invite juniors as well?

A: The CDC targets seniors, but also juniors and sophomores.

Comment: Even if a certain company doesn't appear to have any openings, students should still send their resumes. Large companies keep these on file and will search through them when jobs become available.

Report on the Center for Academic Success

Katie then introduced Andrea Burch, Director of the Center for Academic Success, to give us an update on how the University assists students who are struggling academically. Andrea reported that there have been some important recent changes in her department. They've been looking at ways to improve AU retention, and the Retention Round Table recommended that academic support services for students be increased and that we should also explore creating a centralized learning center on campus.

Her office used to be called Special Academic Services, but the new name is Center for Academic Success and it is a more centralized learning center. They are still doing the majority of things that were done in the past, but they have added more programs and services to support students who do not have disabilities, but are still struggling academically. (Andrea was able to hire an Assistant Director this year, which has made it possible to expand their services.)

Andrea explained that AU's program for students with disabilities is comprehensive. All standard types of accommodations are available, such as extended time on tests, note takers, text-to-speech software, smart pens, etc. They also have academic consultants who can meet with students one-on-one to ensure they have the skills necessary to be successful. The services are tailored to the specific student's needs. AU attracts a higher percentage of students with disabilities than other 4-year private institutions. This is probably in part due to our reputation for doing so well in working with these students. (Parents of new students often say that they heard about the program from parents of current or past students.)

She also stressed that many others on campus work with her office to assist students. The University is using a new system called Beacon that allows faculty, staff and administrators to enter an alert about a student if they have a concern. The issue could be behavioral or academic in nature. Faculty members have been submitting quite a few alerts and they are responding positively to this new system. The alerts go out to all those who can be of help to the students. Andrea sees all of these alerts and can personally reach out to students who are struggling academically, giving them information about the availability of tutoring and supplemental instruction, etc. Beacon can also help them to identify trends – e.g. if a large number of students seem to be having trouble with procrastination or time management, those are important trends to note and respond to.

Q: Do they do assessments for students with disabilities?

A: No they don't do them in her office, but they do refer students to the AU Child and Family Services Center where those assessments can be done.

They offer group tutoring and individual tutoring. All tutors are peers who have taken the class before. This tutoring service is free. Some courses are traditionally more difficult than others (i.e. math and science courses), so this semester they implemented a program called "supplemental instruction." Tutoring support is offered for these courses, but they also include building skills toward mastering the content. They coach students on how to study and take notes for that particular course. Supplemental Instruction (S.I.) was just piloted this spring.

The Center for Academic Success recently did an evaluation of all their programs and services. Student response has been pretty positive so far.

Q: Is the Supplemental Instruction just available for math and science courses or for other courses, as well? It seems like a lot of students just do not know how to study.

A: It is true that the inability to study effectively is a national trend among college students. For now, we are targeting S.I. on courses that traditionally have the highest failure rates. We are still experimenting to see how it will work and are focusing on first-year courses.

Q: How does the Writing Center fit in to all of this?

A: It is a separate program, but Andrea often refers students to the Writing Center and they are in discussions now about possibly joining their programs together.

Report from the Bookstore Manager

Katie then introduced Marcy Bradley, Manager of the AU Bookstore. Marcy explained that, when a student first starts college it can be tough to navigate textbooks, so she came to our meeting today to help clear up some confusion. First of all, she wanted to be sure that all parents know anytime they have questions they can reach out to her and her staff and they will be happy to assist them.

Students can purchase textbooks new or used. They can also rent textbooks (rental of textbooks has grown 220%), or can use digital textbooks (use of digital texts has risen 20%).

Students can save up to 50% if they rent textbooks rather than buy.

Q: Are the textbook prices at the AU Barnes & Noble Bookstore the best prices?

A: Not necessarily – but our Bookstore has the *correct* textbook – the exact right one for the course.

Sometimes you can't buy a used textbook, you need to buy a new one. If students go into Banner they will find out what books they need for the course and it will say if the book is "required" or just "recommended." If required it means you have to buy it and bring it to class. If it is recommended, you don't necessarily have to buy it – students should go to class first and find out from the professor if they actually need it.

Another way of "delivering supplemental information" that is starting to grow is on-line access. Textbook publishers provide on-line access and supplemental materials when you purchase a textbook.

If a new textbook comes packaged with an access code, you won't get that access code with a used copy. Without the code students cannot access the online study aids and resources, or the on-line access piece for turning in homework and test taking. In some cases you can purchase the access code, but it may cost in the range of \$80-\$100.

New textbooks are definitely more expensive, and students can buy on-line and get cheaper prices, but if you go online you may get the wrong title or the wrong edition. Another problem with used books is that they are often highlighted or marked up.

If you order on-line through Amazon, and the book comes from a third-party, most likely you can't return it. If you buy or rent a book from Barnes & Noble, it is fully returnable (up to 30 days).

Q: Isn't it true that some of the on-line books are like rentals -- you have access for 180 days, and after that it disappears?

A: Yes, this is true.

Comment: More and more publishers are going with a loose leaf type option for books. It can be confusing, because sometimes two options are offered and it looks like you have to buy both – the bound copy and the loose leaf version. It needs to be made clear that it is the exact same book in two different formats.

Response: The AU Barnes & Noble Bookstore just rolled out an updated version of their website. The new platform is more compatible with Apple. Their website is now much friendlier and should be easier to use and understand.

Q: When students took French and had to purchase the textbook it never specified that the book needed to be new in order to get the access code. This was a problem. Couldn't the faculty member have the code and give it out to the students?

A: For language classes, we no longer sell used books, because we know those access codes are required. The faculty can't give out the codes because that is actually illegal.

Q: How much does a language textbook cost?

A: Typically for language courses it is a package, including the textbook, access code, workbook and lab manual. The cost is \$300, and it is used for 2 semesters.

The only other class Marcy knows of that requires a package is a Biology course. The professors have identified what the students need for the course.

Q: Are there any restrictions on what professors can require?

A: Many faculty check with Marcy on books, their prices and availability as rentals or used books. They do try to get the best deal to help the students. Sometimes Marcy will break packages apart and advise the faculty that they don't necessarily have to make the students buy the whole package if it isn't needed – to also help keep the prices down. Some have changed to Dover Books because they are cheaper. Some have gone from 5 books down to 3, for example. In the case of the language books, however, those are the most expensive because the whole package is needed.

Parents Association Update

Katie reported that, a few months ago, after a rather unpleasant exchange of posts on the AU Parent2ParentYahoo Group, a Code of Conduct for the group was created and posted. This seems to have helped. Now that many new parents are joining the group, the Code of Conduct should probably be posted again soon.

Recent posts have included questions regarding local hotels, move-in days, meal plans, and the timing of registration/welcome packets being sent to new students.

There have also been a lot of posts that are really geared just to one person, but are being sent to the whole group. A question was raised about possibly changing the default so if you hit reply the message will just go to one person, or at least the sender would be given the option to reply or "reply to all." Melody is going to look into this with Jodi Bailey, the group's administrator.

Report from the Vice President for Student Affairs

Katie then asked Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs, to present her report. Kathy reported that when we went from having two all-you-can-eat facilities to one-all-you-can-eat and one specialty – meal plans had to change. The changes were put in place at the beginning of the academic year. She has a group of students who met with her several times last semester to help the University evaluate and tweak the plans. The upshot was that some significant changes were made in mid-year after they reviewed some concerns and problems that popped up. Since then, the feedback has been that no more changes are needed at this time. The concerns from the fall have been addressed. So, the enhancements made over the winter break seem to have addressed the needs of the students and solved the problems.

There was some concern about parents possibly being confused about the meal plans, but the students are saying that they (students) are not confused – they understand it. As long as AVI continues to have someone stationed at each entrance at the start of the academic year to address any questions regarding to the meal plans, it should be fine.

Q: What about issues of people running out of Saxon Swipes?

A: Some students on the unlimited plan didn't realize they should save their Saxon Swipes for the weekend, so they were running out. This was changed so that there are built in weekend Saxon Swipes. So this semester they are not running out of them.

Q: What are the price differentials from the unlimited plan to the others?

A: The unlimited is the most expensive, and it goes down for others, but not as much as you might think.

There were lots of changes made this past year with regard to residence life. Only one hall is now a first-year hall and a couple of specialty halls (Joel's and Ann's Houses) are just for upper class students, but, the majority are now mixed housing. The response for the most part has been very positive. It also means that, now, we can offer same room sign-up. This is very popular because many students like being able to stay in the same space from year to year.

We also moved room selection up a month, so it happens much earlier in the spring semester.

Room Sync has had a positive impact on roommate conflicts. They occur later in the year and students are taking more ownership of correcting the problem. We used to use Room Sync just for first-year students, but it is now available for graduate and new transfer students, as well.

The new Recreation Center is now open and it is beautiful with a great indoor track. They've had at least 500 recreational users a week, doesn't include sports teams and intra-murals.

The softball field is now in full use. It is a great spectator sport.

Our new athletic director has focused quite a bit on service within the Athletic Department. So far over 12,000 hours of service have been given by athletes to the community, not even including the equestrian program which is also dedicated to service and has received an award for it.

We've had some great success lately – one of our swimmers has gone to nationals, we've had equestrian students go to nationals, and also a javelin thrower. Softball is doing great – also men's basketball. For the first time ever the men's basketball team made it to the empire 8 tournament. Their coach was also named coach of the year.

Recently one of our alums, Pamela Bernstein, made a generous gift to support the Women of Influence Lecture series. This is a great endorsement of our Leadership Center.

In the Center for Student Involvement you can now find the Art-o-Mat. An artist has taken an old cigarette machine and retrofitted it to be an art dispenser. The artworks come packaged in cigarette shaped boxes for \$5 each. After we see how well this is received, we might consider expanding it to include our own students' art. Currently it is not the artwork of AU students.

Kathy also reported that the recent demolition of Davis Gym happened very quickly. The space was cleared so construction on the new ceramics museum can begin. This came as a shock for some of our students, even though we've been saying for a few years that it would happen eventually. Since the recreation center is now open, some of the clubs and activities that were housed in Davis were moved there. The Bike Hub was moved to the Campus Center, which has turned out to be a much better location for that. But some things, like the indoor skate park, the medieval club, roller skating parties and certain concerts, couldn't be easily relocated. President Edmondson is working with our donor base to raise funds for a new multi-purpose structure that can be used for those activities in the future.

Q: Is there an option for substance free housing?

A: We used to offer that option (1st floor Kruson), but there wasn't a high response rate for that type of living space. We do, however, have some quiet residence halls.

Q: Can you give us an update on renovation of suite buildings?

A: We are still trying to renovate at least one a year. Crawford is being updated this summer.

Parent Programs Report

Katie thanked Kathy for her report and said it is our tradition at this time of year to honor the parents of seniors. She congratulated board member Allison Bishop-White on the upcoming graduation of her daughter Lauren White. Other board members with students graduating this year are Jack and Claudia Stillwaggon.

Melody then announced that she will be retiring as of April 30. Katie thanked her for her years of service and presented her with a card and gift on behalf of the Parents Association.

Adjournment

Katie thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting at 11:00 a.m.