

**Alfred University Parents Association  
Annual Meeting  
September 17, 2011**

**Minutes**

**Call to Order**

Parents Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. There were approximately 20 people in attendance. Members of the AU administration included President Charles Edmondson; Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parent Programs.

Katie welcomed everyone and then introduced President Edmondson.

**President Edmondson's Remarks**

President Edmondson welcomed everyone and expressed appreciation for the confidence the parents have demonstrated in AU by entrusting us with their children. He said we take that seriously and try to do the best job we can, first, to be sure they are safe, and also to be sure they don't miss any opportunity to prepare themselves for the future. The future has probably never looked more uncertain to our young people than it does today.

We are, as an institution, engaged in a conversation about how we can re-think what we are doing; what we offer. This is a troubled time in the world and we are facing a challenge. What prepared students adequately in the past, will probably be inadequate in the future. We are trying to prepare them for a society in which diversity is the norm, not the exception. They are most likely going to be working with people from all over the globe. We are working hard to establish safe, academically sound programs that will enable them to have an experience in another culture. They are emotionally ready for that. You have raised them to be appropriately cautious, but also very receptive to new things. Continue to give them the kind of attention you've given them in the past. They need to know that you care. Impress upon them that they should not waste this opportunity.

The future is going to be more competitive than ever, especially for us Americans. Please stay engaged with your kids, and stay engaged with us. We are not perfect, but we will do our best to correct any problems.

**Parents Association President's Update**

Katie Rommel-Esham reported that we had a good meeting of the Parents Advisory Board earlier in the day. Vice President Kathy Woughter, Dean of Students Norm Pollard, and Director of Residence Life Brenda Porter presented information regarding the banner number of first-year students and the associated challenges Residence Life faced and will continue to face as students settle in. Dr. Pollard talked about the University's policy on bullying: face-to-face and cyber. Incidents of bullying can be reported on-line at [my.alfred.edu](http://my.alfred.edu) through the *AU Care Network* and *AU Report It*.

Katie suggested that all parents should sign up for the weekly AU E-news (to subscribe simply send a message to [enews@alfred.edu](mailto:enews@alfred.edu)). It is a great source of information. She also encouraged those who can to come back in mid-October to see the beautiful fall foliage in this area.

Katie then introduced Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs.

## **Student Affairs Update**

Kathy Woughter reported that we had a spectacular opening, welcoming the largest first-year class the University has ever had. Hurricane Irene led to a bit of chaos, because we weren't completely ready for the large number of students who had to return earlier than their predicted time due to that storm, but we were able to work through that and had a great opening.

One nice by-product of such a large class is the increase in the level of involvement on the part of first-year students in organizations. And not only did they join them in the enthusiasm that comes with the start of the semester -- they are staying involved, sticking with these clubs and organizations. They seem to know that they will be changed by college, but also can effect change at AU. We are all benefiting from that.

Please encourage your students to visit the Career Development Center. They do a great job in helping students find internships and co-ops, they provide job fairs, leadership fairs and community service opportunities, offer assistance to students in choosing or changing majors, and more.

We believe all students have the potential to be leaders. The Beth Robinson Judson Leadership Center is the home of our flagship leadership program. It includes the Women's Leadership Academy and also the Gary Horowitz Leadership Development Program. This is a certificate program, not credit based, so please encourage your student to get involved. The Leadership Center is also the home of our Saxon Sidekicks program -- a mentoring program for first-year students. When this mentoring program was offered to first-year students we thought we would get maybe 40 students to sign up. Instead, we got 126 and were able to find mentors for all of them. It's not too late to get involved. If your first-year student is having trouble making connections, they can still get involved. All they need to do is go to the Leadership Center and say they'd like to sign up for a mentor.

Kathy also reported on the athletics campaign -- *Score One for AU*. We've already seen some enhancements in our sports facilities, including new turf on Merrill Field and new bleachers. We'll be raising more funds for a new recreation center, and look forward to building a soft ball stadium, enhancing our practice facilities, etc. Kathy said this is the first time she can recall our having a campaign focused specifically on athletics. These enhancements will benefit our sports teams, but also recreational athletes, intramural athletes, and other students.

After the recent flooding in and around Binghamton, the University adopted a school in that area -- MacArthur Elementary School. We are currently conducting a donation drive to help the teachers buy supplies, backpacks, etc. to replace items that were lost due to flooding.

In the "Only in Alfred" category:

- A new sugar shack is being constructed by students in partnership with AU Physical Plant. Once it is complete they will be gathering sap and making maple syrup right here on campus.
- We are starting our first "Horse to Holler Hike," which will take place October 9. The hike starts at the Equestrian Center, goes around Foster Lake, through State Forest land, and ends up at Pollywog Holler -- a total distance of about 7½ miles. Students who wish to participate must register by Oct. 3. Aid stations will be provided along the way and at the end there will be a big celebration with pizza, etc. This is a great way to get students out into the great outdoors. Kathy and her husband will be out in the woods making s'mores and giving them out to hikers as they go by.
- Equest-Fest -- This is a fun party for students that will be held at the Equestrian Center on October 4. It features a huge buffet, barn dance, rock climbing, horse rides, roping demonstration, games, etc. Students will have dinner on the ring. Transportation will be provided from Powell Campus Center.

*Q: We're glad that there's a Beth Judson Leadership Center for women, but boys seem to be a bit marginalized. Seems like a pretty good balance of boys and girls here. Can there also be leadership training for boys?*

A: This year we actually have 55% men in the first-year class. We usually have approximately 50-50. The Women's Leadership Center has been and continues to be a great resource for students; both males and females have been involved in WLC programming and events. The Beth Robinson Judson Leadership Center is for all -- and there have been special programs created to attract male students to the Center. Now, with this enhanced programming, more males should be participating. We got a great response from students on move-in day -- students of both genders expressed interest in the Leadership Center.

### **Director of Parent Programs Report**

Melody McLay, Director of Summer and Parent Programs, reported that the new *AU Parent Handbook* has been well-received. Parents volunteers handed copies out to parents at New Student Check-In and also at Parents Orientation. If anyone doesn't have a copy and would like one, please contact her. The *Handbook* is also available in PDF form on the AU Parent's Website ([www.alfred.edu/parents](http://www.alfred.edu/parents)).

She also encouraged everyone to check the Parent's Website regularly for important information and announcements, especially the "News for Parents" page. She'll be updating that page throughout the year.

### **Open Discussion**

*Q: It is interesting to hear that this is the largest class ever. To what do you attribute this?*

A: President Edmondson responded that it is ironic, because the number of New York State high school graduates this year is 11% *below* where it was 15 years ago. The high school graduate population is in a permanent state of decline. It appears as if it will continue to decline – particularly in areas such as Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester and, to some extent, Long Island. And yet, in the midst of this, we have the largest first-year class in history, and approximately 100 more in each class than we had two years ago.

No one really knows why, but maybe, under the pressure of the current economy, people who in the past might not have gone to college are more motivated to do so. So, perhaps a larger share of the high school graduate population is choosing to enroll. We're glad to have the increased enrollment, but it challenges things we've always assumed about population and college attendance rates.

*Q: How many applicants did you have, and of those, how many were accepted?*

A: President Edmondson responded that the number of applicants was just shy of 3,000, and we accepted roughly 70%. 576 new students came. Although, nationally, SAT scores have been going down – we're not seeing that in our applicant pool. In fact, our ratings have actually gone up this year. Those indicators are positive and encouraging.

*Comment – We appreciate the opportunities here for all students. Our son was not accepted by a couple of other schools, but Alfred accepted him and he is doing very well in the School of Engineering.*

*Q: Are some students who would have gone Ivy League schools coming here instead due to cost?*

A: No, actually that isn't the case. Families of students who go to Ivy League schools are extremely affluent and are still sending their children to those schools.

There are 21 private higher education institutions in NY – more than in any other state – so there's a lot of competition.

*Comment – The job market has changed greatly. It used to be that companies and grad schools would go to colleges to woo students. It isn't like that now. Graduating college students are competing for a smaller number of available positions due to companies downsizing. It is important for our kids to know how to make use of what's available through the Internet, how to do personal networking, be self-promoters, self-marketers, and learn how to access the services there.*

Response: Kathy Woughter explained that, before she became Vice President, she was Director of the Career Development Center here. When she entered that field things were shifting from placement offices placing students in jobs where they would stay for many years. There's been a shift in philosophy to career development. What we focus on is creativity. Creativity is a very valued concept, not just for artists, but for all students. Whole industries now exist that we never even thought of. People who are able to adapt will be most successful. We do that very well here.

The Career Development Center has a Linked-In group and they teach students how to get involved with that – how to network. They also provide career services to our alumni for life. They give information about how to use the Chamber of Commerce, how to re-locate, how to use electronic resources, etc.

*Q: Aren't student organizations supposed to be open to accepting new members? A couple of students tried to join an organization recently and got the impression they didn't want any new members.*

A: Any student organization funded by Student Senate must be willing to take on new members. Some are not funded by Student Senate and are not under that obligation. Kathy will share this with the Director of Student Activities because we do not want to give that impression. Please encourage the students to contact us and we will put them in contact with the proper person to address this issue.

Katie thanked everyone for coming and encouraged all interested in joining the Parents Advisory Board to let us know before they leave.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

*mhm/9-22-11*