

**Alfred University Parents Association  
Annual Meeting  
September 21, 2013**

**Minutes**

**Call to Order**

Parents Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. There were approximately 40 people in attendance. Members of the AU administration included President Charles Edmondson; Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; John Dietrich, Director of Dining Services, and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parent Programs.

To begin the meeting, Katie introduced President Charles Edmondson.

**President Edmondson's Remarks**

President Edmondson thanked everyone for coming and said that he never forgets the fact that they have entrusted AU with the most precious thing, their children. We take this responsibility very seriously and their welfare is always in the forefront of our minds.

He then said that he believes it has never been more complicated to be a young person in America than it is today. The life choices our students are called on to make are more plentiful and complex than those earlier generations had to face.

It is extremely important that our students focus on the completion of their degree. The average college graduate in America earns a million dollars more in their lifetime than the average high school graduate. But it only works if they successfully graduate, so we must all do everything we can to make sure these students complete their education.

A few years ago we began bringing in much larger than usual freshman classes, but we found that our ability to enable those students to stay and complete their degrees began to decline. We have been looking at this to try to improve the University's retention rate.

One big reason for doing this is the cost of higher education. We are trying to head off future pressures to increase tuition levels through forward-looking actions. We are trying to reduce our expenses by \$1.25 million within the next 3 years. We will be doing most of that this year. This will be accomplished largely through natural attrition of our employees. While no one enjoys making reductions in expenses, we feel it our obligation so an Alfred University education remains affordable. He will be working on a new fundraising campaign, beginning this year. His recommendation will be to make student scholarships the primary emphasis of the campaign.

### **Parents Association President's Report**

Katie welcomed everyone again and provided information about the Parents Association and the Parents Advisory Board. We've discussed many important issues over the years and have made recommendations for positive changes. The University administration has been responsive to our suggestions. If anyone is interested in joining the Advisory Board, please let one of us know. One major resource for the Parents Association is the AUParent2Parent Yahoo Group. She has received a lot of positive feedback from parents who have benefited from this helpful information exchange.

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

### **Vice President for Student Affairs Report**

Kathy mentioned that we made a lot of changes to the Parents Orientation program this year, based upon what parents asked for last year. We added more information sessions and spread the events throughout the day. She thanked everyone who responded to the email with the link to a survey regarding this year's Parents Orientation. The feedback was very helpful and will help us fine tune the program. We tried to offer a lot more, but perhaps in this case less is more. Based upon this year's feedback we will be changing back to a shorter, more compact Parents Orientation program.

We have also implemented many other changes on campus. The biggest have to do with food and housing. The major change to the housing model was that we opened up traditional upper class halls to first-year students as well, to give them more choices. This change has been very well received. We used to house all of our first-year students together, but now they are living alongside upper class students. We also used Room Sync which allowed students to choose their own roommates. This worked well - there are far fewer roommate problems than in past years. Students feel more ownership in the choice, so perhaps they are putting more effort into getting along with each other. We also had to make changes to the RA training model to prepare them to work with first-year as well as upper class students.

The new athletic director comes from a background with high levels of school spirit. One of our goals over the past year was to come up with a way to increase attendance at sports events. We created two mascots – Little Alf and a horse and rider (King Alfred and Alden). We debuted them at the football game last week. We have also done more educating of team captains and there is a new program called “Saxons for Saxons” – where each team can pick one game when all the other teams' members are invited to come out to support them. Additionally, students get points for their hall cup if they attend events. As a result of these efforts, attendance and enthusiasm at athletic competitions is on the rise.

We've also seen increased membership in student clubs, especially those with an outdoor emphasis. Two students started a Quidditch team on campus and it is very popular. There were 150 watching the first Quidditch match! (There is actually an international organization of Quidditch. There are very specific rules they follow.) Our gospel choir and other faith-based organizations on campus have seen an increase in membership, as well.

Our new Recreation Center, connected to McLane, will be opening soon. There is a lot of student interest in this facility. We expect it to be fully occupied all the time as soon as it opens. There's an elevated track, basketball courts, etc. We hope it will be open by the spring semester.

Kathy then introduced John Dietrich, Director of Dining Services. He reported that he has been hearing from students for several years that they wanted a bigger retail operation here. It took at least 3-4 years of student feedback to make this change happen. It has gone over very well, with the exception of the fact that the meal plans had to be changed and there is some confusion about them.

AVI Fresh, the AU food service provider, turned Powell into a retail facility. There are 5 stations: Piazza (calzones, pizzas and pastas), Wrapped (made-to-order wraps and salads), Agave (Mexican food), Fresh (prepared salads, wraps, desserts and snacks), Pollo (hand-breaded chicken dishes, premium burgers straight from the grill) along with Art's Spot (gourmet coffee, fresh pastries, bagels & donuts). So far the student response to the food has been very positive. (On weekends Agave changes to a brunch menu and students can use their Saxon swipes for this.)

We wanted to have meal plans that would give students a variety of choices and enable them to eat at Ade as well as Powell. We originally thought Ade would be the one open on weekends but students said they preferred to have Powell open on the weekends. (We typically don't have a high enough number of diners on the weekends to warrant keeping both facilities open.) So that's how the Saxon Swipes came about. We changed to having meals in Ade Monday through Friday and included Saxon Swipes in the plans so students could also eat on the weekends in Powell.

We based the plans on students eating only about 2-3 meals in the dining hall each weekend, which was the average in past years, but some are eating more than that, and some are using their Saxon Swipes more than we expected.

One thing that confused some people was that the King Alfred plan includes unlimited meals in Ade, but that is only for Monday through Friday. Some of the students on that plan are finding that they don't have enough Saxon Swipes to get through all the weekends. (If anyone is in danger of running out of Saxon Swipes students can contact Dining Services and John will make sure they have enough to get through the semester.)

*Q: We got the unlimited plan, but changed to other plan, because there weren't enough Saxon Swipes. Now we find out that our student could have gotten more swipes. The plans were confusing and should be explained better. Students aren't really sure what they should do. It would be helpful to be able to go online and see how many swipes or meals or dining dollars are left on the card.*

A: We realize some things need to be changed, and the meal plans will be tweaked for the spring semester. This semester, John just wants to make sure the students have enough meals, whether they are on the King Alfred plan or another plan. Before spring, they are going to come up with a plan that should work better, especially for those who eat more meals on the weekend.

Kathy explained that an important factor in developing these plans was that she asked the dining company not to change the prices from past years. We wanted 5 plans with the exact same costs. So an unintended consequence was that some of the plans turned out to be not intuitive. This will change for next year. She thought it would be an easier transition than it is. They referred to

models used by other schools – and the plans work there, but those schools have been doing this for many years and the students were used to them.

John mentioned that they involved students in the planning and he also did a presentation on the plans to the Student Senate and to the RAs and RDs. Most students seem to be getting used to the plans, but we realize there are some things that need to be fixed.

This feedback is really helpful and will be used as they change things for next semester.

*Q: It sounds like as the semester goes on there will continue to be problems for students running out of Saxon Swipes and, although it sounds like you are willing to work with them, how are the students going to know that?*

*A: This mostly involves students housed on campus so they will get the word out through the residence hall staff. But students can also send email or call dining service if they run into problems.*

*Q: What about sending a letter to the parents about this – especially toward the end of the semester – to make sure they know that Saxon Swipes can be added if students are running low?*

*Comment – I like the combination of the swipes and the dining dollars – so if they don't want a whole meal because they can use their dining dollars, rather than paying the price for a meal.  
Comment: I think this is good, but maybe more detail could be included in the information sent to students and parents about selecting a meal plan – maybe a section on how to select and then how to manage your food plan.*

*Comment: It is good to know you are working to keep costs in line. You might want to consider providing a way to check the account balance online so students can see how much they have left.*

Kathy responded that there is a program we could buy that would do that, but we haven't been able to commit the money to that yet, it is very expensive.

*Comment: It is important to highlight the option of using the dining dollars if they don't want an entire meal. Dining dollars are great.*

*Comment: This is their daughter's third year here and she is not happy with the choices at Ade. There aren't a lot of choices, the portions are small, and the lines are long.*

*Comment: I've eaten there a lot and it is great. I think the small portions are so people can eat a lot of different things.*

John commented that they provide 5-6 different entrees at each meal plus sandwiches, salad bar, etc. When we first started this type of service it was difficult for our staff and managers to get used to. There were times when the portions were too small, but he thinks they've gotten better at this. They are trying to prevent waste. That is the main reason they went tray less.

*Comment: Daughter says the food isn't good and her friends have echoed this and said that the food runs out and you have to stand around and wait.*

*Comment: Son said that the food is great.*

John said that, during Fall Break, he plans on checking to see which students' Saxon Swipes are running low, and he will reach out to them.

*Comment: Good news – we saw in the newspaper that Alfred University was ranked third on U.S. News and World Report's "Best Value School" list of regional universities in the north!*

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

9/23/13, mhm