AAS Senate Meeting Minutes

Date: 11/16/2015
Meeting Begins: 8:39 PM

I. Attendance

II. Public Comment

None.

III. BC Recommendations

Paul Gramieri presented the BC recommendations for the week.

*A motion was made to approve the BC recommendations for the week.*

Roll call vote to approve the BC recommendations for the week.

*Result: Passed.*

IV. Reports

a. Committee Reports

Paul, representing CPR, reported that they are changing the college pension plan to be more equitable and fair.

Tasha Kim, representing Curriculum Committee, reported that they have been talking extensively about campus conversation and are working on education about diversity.

Andrew Orozco, representing the Sexual Respect Task Force, reported that they are remodeling the Title IX website off the ones at Berkley and Dartmouth.

Sam Keaser, representing CEP, reported that they are discussing shortening the academic semester to 14 weeks.

b. General Announcements

c. Officer Reports

Paul reported to tell constituents to submit budget requests and check requests by December 9th.

Tomi Williams reported that the college council poll supported the 2-2 split. He said the forum tonight is considered a meeting and if you
have to leave earlier than the meeting ends, it will count as an absence.

Will Jackson reported that we will have an important meeting when we get back from break on how senate works.

V. Approve the Minutes

*Pierre-Alexander Low moved to approve the minutes from November 9th.*

**Vote to approve the minutes from November 9th.**

*Result: Passed.*

VI. Mascot Poll Language

Mohamed Ramy suggested getting rid of the asterisk that clarifies that this is not in support of any alternate mascot.

Sam said that the reason for this is to clarify because it's not obvious.

*A motion to approve the language.*

**Vote to approve the language.**

*Result: Passed.*

VII. Forum

Tomi thanked everyone for coming. He said students have begun an important conversation and he was thankful people were willing to continue this conversation tonight. People in administration will talk about efforts they've made to make Amherst a more inclusive community.

Will explained the agenda for tonight’s meeting.

Alex Vasquez, Dean of Students, said the Powerhouse is an example of one way they hoped for students to rethink social life on campus. He wanted to talk about what resonated with him from the conversations over the weekend. He said they are looking at cultural competency training for staff. He said they are committed to beginning this and commit to it long term. He hopes to include real student voices in the training. He said student affairs is trying to hire diverse staff members with national searches. Currently they are searching for one more area coordinator, a chief diversity officer, and directors for the MRC and WGC.

Suzanne Coffey, Chief Student Affairs Officer, said they working on how to make sure student programming doesn’t overlap and thinking of way to bring students out as a community. She said
this weekend was an amazing example of how Amherst can be a community. She said they need to find ways to make students aware of programming and resources in student affairs.

Jacqueline Alvarez, Director of Counseling Center, explained that they are working to expand their scope of services. They’ve already added case management, after hours care, and outreach. They’ve hired new staff that have diversified their office. She said Amherst Uprising has brought to light short comings in the office. She said there are 4 areas of goal setting: holding space for students, writing letters of support to Uprising, forming a student advisory board, and cultural competency training. She wants to get staff out and about at student events and hope to develop strong liaison relationships with affinity groups.

John Carter, Chief of Police, said the one goal of the department is to ensure that we are safe. He said they already do diversity training. He said Amherst Uprising was heartwarming because he saw that officers were sitting in groups and engaging in discussions.

Bonnie Drake suggested for the counseling center to have dorm events to develop relationships. She asked how they communicate between offices.

Dean Vasquez said that they communicate electronically and they have a leadership meeting once a week.

Suzanne said there are regularly scheduled meetings throughout the week.

Jacqueline said there is a lot of informal communication on a daily basis.

Becky said in her molecular genetics class they spoke about the movement. She said her professor sometimes thinks she was only hired for diversity sake, not for her intelligence. She asked how we make sure that the faculty we hire feels welcome here.

Suzanne said Catherine Epstein will talk about this later, but they speak about this issue as senior staff often. She said they hope to make the community feel completely inclusive.

Jacqueline said this is indicative of a systemic problem and folks of color in graduate school often question their place in an institution but their accomplishments often surpass colleagues.

Shruthi Badri asked about pointing students to the right resources because has heard complaints about availability of resources but based on her experience thinks it just not knowing how to access them.

Suzanne said case managers are great. You can also contact your class dean who can let you know about anything you might need.
John Carter said the police department has the ability to put you in contact with any resource that you may need.

Andrew Lindsay said he knows of many people in his class that have left the school. He was wondering if they have statistics for retention of students of color.

Dean Vasquez said they don't see anything in their data on retention for POC being different. He said an overwhelming majority of students graduate but they want to make sure students are thriving.

Joy Xu asked about resources on campus for counseling, instead of outsourcing but low income students don't have the resources to pay copays.

Jacqueline said accessibility is important and they want to make all services available on campus. She said they keep 96% of cases on campus and a case manager working to interview folks in the region to see what their areas of expertise are to get a robust referral network. She said the counseling center pays copays so students don't pay anything out of pocket for their services.

Katie Fretwell, Dean of Admission & Financial Aid, said the office is talking about recruitment efforts, yield efforts, and future initiatives. For recruitment, admissions staff visits 550 secondary schools around the world that are serving low income or high populations of students of color to find pockets of talent. She said QuestBridge is a magnificent tool for Amherst and 12% of current students have came through QuestBridge. She said Amherst moved away from conducting personal interviews on campus. She said they offer two diversity open houses each fall and are launching a tele-mentoring program between Amherst students and high school seniors to help students plan for the college application process. She said Amherst recently announced that they will be joining a coalition to make free resources available to help students develop a custom application. She expressed concern about the Fisher case being decided by the Supreme Court.

Gail Holt, Dean of Financial Aid, explained that they review family circumstances and provide the greatest resources to students with least financial means. She said all students benefit from the no loan policy and they were one of the first schools to remove loans for financial aid packages.

Kevin Weinman, Chief Financial Officer, explained that his responsibility is to connect institution needs with resources. He said the CPR helps set priorities but money doesn’t solve all problems and our ideas out strip our wealth.

Lauren Clarke, Dean of International Students, said that her department did have cultural competency training with staff. She said 50 people came across 5 campuses, but most were from
Amherst. She said international student orientation is six days but they want to create more opportunities.

Paul asked why varsity athletes don’t reflect the diversity of Amherst.

Dean Fretwell said they are working on it and monitoring it carefully. She said we are doing better than our NESCAC peers.

Mashi asked what the plan is looking forward for diversity recruitment.

Dean Fretwell said they are looking to increase native enrollment at Amherst and increase support.

Felix said he is a community college transfer student and never got a phone call from a current student. He said they should feel just as welcome.

Dean Fretwell said the community college program came from a grant and she feels they can do a better job.

Asa wondered why they didn’t do an international search for staff, instead of just a national search.

Dean Fretwell said this is a good point. Job searches are read internationally but they mostly receive American applicants. She said there are 2 non-US citizens working on their staff but didn’t come through an international recruitment process.

Lauren said colleges are run very different in other countries but she has met great international candidates.

Ruth said it was problematic to refer to students as “helping as diversity” which turns them into a number.

Dean Fretwell said a better word wold be “to contribute to”.

Rachel asked if there is more cultural competency training planned.

Dean Clarke said yes.

Juan Gabriel Delgado Montes asked given the drive of recruiting native american students, how does the mascot effect these efforts.

Dean Fretwell said the mascot can not in anyway support the recruitment of native americans to the college.
Juan Gabriel said we do well with representative diversity in the admissions process, but asked to what extent we consider the character qualities of students.

Dean Fretwell said the most important thing we can do is look at the context students have had to take advantage of opportunities. She said they pay close attention to sustained commitments.

Gabby said she is not a low income student but she can’t afford to be at Amherst. There is a lot of talk about how amazing financial aid is, but every single year it is a tremendous struggle. She lives off campus because its the only way she could afford to stay.

Dean Holt thanked her for sharing this story. She said there are a lot of students hold struggle to make Amherst affordable and they try to make resources as equitable as possible. She said they do the best they can but don’t always do it perfectly right. She said they try to provide students with as many options as possible.

Keylee said she’s in a similar boat to Gabby. She said she feels like she’s being lied to by Dean Holt. She said anyone who is middle class has an incredibly difficult time paying for Amherst. She argued that they can’t advertise that we are no loan.

Dean Holt said they don’t make the promise that every single student will be able to graduate without loan debt but when they create financial aid packages they don’t include loans that peers do. She said she would like to talk more about class financial struggles on this campus.

Bella Berkley thanked everyone for their participation in the forum and asked about systems being in place to evaluate methods of dealing with the approach to outreach initiatives.

Dean Fretwell said outreach that is done virtually is harder to monitor so we need to hear from current students about their experience. She said they try to create candid opportunities for questions. She said that President Martin will be having office hours and maybe all offices should have that.

Andrew Orozco told Mr. Weinman that one of the arguments for retaining the mascot is that changing it would affect the endowment. He asked if we do remove the mascot, does he anticipate that we will see the endowment impacted.

Kevin said this isn't a major part of the conversation. He said we are always concerned about what alumni think and feel, but they are not putting any pressure on the conversation based on the endowment. If a donor stops giving because of a mascot, we probably don’t want that money anyway. He said we need to take alumni opinions seriously but its not a specific concern in this case.
Alex said international students were hurt that they didn’t get the same grand welcoming to campus as the rest of the students.

Dean Clarke said they need to discuss this feedback. She said at the international students orientation they wanted to discuss information that is specific to international students.

Myles Gaines told Dean Holt he felt deceived by loan comments earlier. He asked why it’s necessary to pay the lump some of tuition in advance. He said it’s much more difficult for some families than others. He asked why can’t you put together a payment plan.

Dean Holt said there are payment plans. There’s a 10 month plan with no interest involved. She said loans are another way families can spread out payment.

Catherine Epstein, Dean of Faculty, reported that at the faculty meeting they unanimously voted against using Lord Jeff as the mascot.

Biddy Martin, President, said she hasn’t been feeling well. She said she was pleased that the faculty supported the student initiative.

Jamal thanked president Martin from coming out. He asked about tuition policy because it seems like its increasing with no end in sight and he’s concerned for future generations of the college. He asked if it will ever decrease.

President Martin said she wished there was a way for colleges to change the financing structure. She said colleges have few sources of revenue. Liberal arts colleges have tuition, pay out from the endowment and annual giving. She said the rate of increase in college tuition needs to go down. She said Amherst discounts the sticker price based on a family’s ability to pay.

Sam Rosenblum asked about the possibility of allocating funding necessary to add more tenure line track professors to get a more diverse faculty.

Biddy said we don’t need to add to the number of faculty to diversify faculty. She said faculty are retiring at a fast clip. She said every department needs to be recruiting scholars and educators of color. The Board of Trustees sets the limit to number of faculty and we are at the limit. She said we could lift the cap, and she already asked for this back in January.

Dean Epstein said they have been in discussion on how to broaden the pool of diverse applicants. They have been tracking diverse applicants through the process and are confident that systems they have in place right now will work. She said they’ve gotten more faculty buy in to the programs.

Ramy said throughout Thursday we heard a lot of stories of pain but throughout evening it was a self-selected group. He said people who were there on Thursday are not here today. He said one
of his friends said racism doesn’t exist and people are being cry babies. He asked how you address that kind of institutionalized racism.

Biddy said anyone who says racism doesn’t exist is not living in reality. She said confronting racism is an urgent responsibility at Amherst and in the world. She said this is an amazing place, but it is formed by a particular cultural history that was not formed by most of the people at the school.

Ramy asked why they accept students that think racism is dead.

Biddy understands that he wishes admissions were decided by a question like that but they can’t decide that an ideological basis will prevent students from acceptance to Amherst. They have to deal with racism the hard way.

Adrian asked about the tenure process because faculty of color don’t feel that personal relationships and support of students is taken into account.

Dean Epstein said they hear about these experiences through faculty evaluations. She said they are trying to understand the challenge these faculty face, but their support of students is heard.

Biddy said this is a discussion that faculty needs to have about what counts in tenure processes. She said every student evaluation gets read but the question is what the relevant balance is between research, teaching, and service.

Frank said he’s not trying to undermine attacks in Paris but he wondered why the attacks in Beirut were not addressed in Biddy’s email. He said black and brown lives matter.

Biddy said he is completely right and she should have included Beirut and Bagdad in her email. She said she could blame it on the media because she hadn’t read about Beirut and Baghdad but that’s on her. We did check to make sure that our students in France were okay and if we had students in Beirut. She apologized.

Carlos discussed expanding discussion outside of this room and Frost on Thursday. He asked how we bring other people into the conversation.

Dean Epstein said there are many different things they are discussing with the faculty. They are trying to train faculty and figure out what can we do to get them to realize that some of the behaviors they are engaging in are painful to students.

Biddy said tonight faculty began a discussion with each other on how to make that happen. She said we all need to be educated. She said what happened during orientation to bring consent to a level of explicitness does seem to last and it shows that training can be effective.
Michael, class of 2011, said he had a negative experience at Amherst. He said its amazing how diverse this place is but what’s strange is that friends of his have managed not to interact with that diversity in their four years. He suggested a second freshman class on social justice.

Biddy said she's a fan of the open curriculum, but the faculty have to embrace that maybe not everything should occur by elected affinity at the curricular level.

Jessica Maposa thanked everyone for coming out and having this conversation. She wondered why the Board of Trustees are missing stories students are telling.

Biddy said there were two trustees here when they presented decisions on frats. She said members aren’t on campus right now but are inviting students to attend the annual board meeting in January in Washington, DC to talk about the issues we are having here. She said we could invite the President of the Board of Trustees to campus and she knows he would come.

Dean Epstein invited students to the discussion on academic workload tomorrow.

Biddy said she's been in touch with Cullen Murphy throughout the past five days and the Board certainly cares about what's going on on campus right now.

Don Faulstick, Director of Athletics, said they are trying to build community between different groups. He said they are trying to expand intramural sports and reach out to everyone on campus. He said they are working with the MRC to start a student athlete diversity council.

Ursula Olender, Director of Career Center, said she was personally a first generation student. She said they pay a lot of attention to who is coming into the office and who isn’t. She said they haven’t seen a significant difference between ethnic groups. She said she recognizes that the staff doesn’t represent the diverse campus but they are working on it. She said Dean Erandson offers a course on cultural competency.

Elizabeth Anema said the office of alumni and parent program is about furthering engagement with 23,000 alumni. She said pathways and on campus events allow for interaction with alumni. She said there is a separate alumni advisory committee.

Amanda Lopez said she works with affinity alumni. She said they are looking at providing more opportunities for student and alumni interaction. She will be reaching out to groups to see what people are interested in.

Emily Griffen said she manages the pathways program and they've learned a lot so far. They've discovered that there is a mismatch between alumni of color and current demographics student body. She said only 30% of alumni body are women and they are trying to improve search criteria.
Maeve McNamara said she heard students of color feel burdened by need to educate white students, faculty, and coaches. She asked how are coaches being educated in the athletic department.

Don said we have Billy McBride who meets with every coach and team about diversity issues. He said there’s a lot to be done there and think the student athlete diversity committee could help.

Kali Robinson said he heard that SAAC has few athletes of color. He asked how are coaches working with students of color and recruiting students of color.

Don said it is a nominated position but we can do a better job having more diversity within that room.

Cami Dominguez said office hours are not the best way to get input because many people aren’t comfortable going to them.

Katie Fretwell said she is open to suggestions.

Bri Cook asked about the percentage of students of color in athletics.

Don said the freshman class is 27%, and its 20% overall. He said staffing is 20% and there are 8 people of color in the department. He said they can do better. He said he is excited about potential green dean positions but there’s a small pool to hire from within athletics.

Bri said obviously we want recruited athletes to match the diversity of the student body. She asked about funding the cost of athletics to make it more affordable for diverse backgrounds.

Don said he understands the burden for these things, because they aren’t optional. He said they are trying to offset the costs faced by women’s teams.

Jamie asked Dean Holt if there are avenues for communication that students aren’t taking advantage of.

Dean Holt said they are constantly looking for ways to make communication better and reach more students.

Alejandro Quintero said with black and latino alumni weekends, the burden of organizing has been on the students.

Amanda said going forward they are trying to take on the work of the planning with the advising of student groups.
Asa said he spent the past couple of years working on the mascot and it seems like there has been a narrative on the athlete/non-athlete divide but he doesn’t think it exists on the issue. He said faculty has taken a firm stance and wondered if the athletic department institutionally plans on taking a stance.

Don said back in September they had a staff meeting that we are moving on from the Lord Jeff. He said moving forward we are not putting it on our clothing and we are eliminating gear purchased with institutional money. He said we know we aren’t going to be the Lord Jeffs and he’s excited for the future.

Bri asked why this wasn’t publicized.

Don said he didn’t know why but its publicized now.

Dean Vasquez said this was a great conversation. He pointed out that Kali was ignored and we should notice our behavior.

Will thanked everyone for coming out.

Tomi also thanked everyone.