

Provost Advisory Council
Summary of November 6, 2008 meeting

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| Bert Garza | Paul Davidovits | Jim Russell |
| Pat Byrne | Pamela Grace | Dick Cobb-Stevens |
| Monique Lowd | Henry Humphreys | Othelia Lee |
| David Quigley | Patrick Rombalski | Lillie Albert |
| Hassan Tehranian | Anita Tien | Kevin Bedell |
| Cole Boskey | Paul Lewis | Don Hafner |
| Gilda Morelli | John Spinard | Pat DeLeeuw |
| Anthony Annunziato | Meghan Cawley | |

1. The summary of the September 25, 2008 meeting was approved and will be forwarded to the President's Office.
2. Vice President for Student Affairs Patrick Rombalski joined the Council to introduce himself and discuss current initiatives throughout the division. A higher-education consulting firm, Keeling and Associates, is conducting a review of Student Affairs from the perspective of developing a theory-driven approach to residential learning. The division is also beginning a strategic planning process that will continue through the end of the 2008-09 academic year. The membership of the Strategic Planning group includes those from outside Student Affairs.

Patrick invited questions from Council members.

- In response to a query about the impact of students in triple rooms, it was stated that the ultimate goal is to eliminate the practice of tripling. Currently, approximately 400 freshmen (out of a total 2,200) are placed in triples.
- With the recent passage of a state ballot initiative decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana, it was noted that while marijuana possession has been decriminalized, it remains illegal and prohibited in the residence halls. Student Affairs remains concerned about any barrier to academic performance for students at Boston College, including drug use.
- A question was raised about whether Boston College undergraduates are less engaged in intellectual or academic conversation than those at other places. Student Affairs is interested in exploring systemic ways to engage students in academic conversations outside the classroom.
- Currently, there is no programming at Boston College for incoming freshmen in the days between their arrival on campus and the beginning of classes in the Fall semester. This is unusual (compared with other institutions) and Student Affairs is formulating some programming proposals.
- In reply to a question about the community-service orientation of BC students, it was stated that much of the service activity at Boston College is developed by students themselves, rather than through a centrally-coordinated university office.
- In response to a question about the role of faculty advisors in student organizations, it was noted that each Student Affairs professional currently has

- 30-40 student organizations to oversee; furthermore, the role that faculty advisors play in student organizations has varied widely. The division anticipates a complete revision of the current arrangements for student groups and their advisors.
- A member of the Council noted that the cost of housing on campus was a disincentive for students working on faculty research during the summer, and asked if the university might provide a housing subsidy.
 - A question was raised about whether BC is placing adequate emphasis--in communications with incoming students and their families--on opportunities for faculty-student interaction, and ways in which students can develop relationships with faculty. The reply was that Student Affairs is very interested in "mapping" the student experience and capturing the ways in which students interact with faculty.
 - It was observed that some of the institutional aspects of Boston College (e.g., the high visibility of athletics programs and facilities) may inform or limit BC's ability to emphasize academic life.
 - Questions were posed about potential mechanisms for changing the student culture at Boston College, to enhance the intellectual tone. It was observed that much of the literature on this topic is derived from smaller institutions, but there appear to be at least two ways to shift student culture: to have programs for freshmen that encourage more intellectual expectations in them right from the start; and to attract the kinds of students from the applicant pool who will contribute to a gradual change in student culture.
 - Student Affairs is beginning to explore technology and possible ways in which social networking websites can be leveraged to stimulate academic conversation.
 - It was observed the BC experience can be challenging for students to navigate, and that they frequently find it difficult to locate and acquire important information. It was agreed that there has not been much centralization of ideas, programs, and services at Boston College. In the past, "prefects" in the dormitories were charged with making information available to students. Now, a single Resident Assistant may have 90-100 students. RAs are charged with frontline counseling and enforcement of the alcohol policy; this has an impact on the ability of RAs to develop relationships with their charges.
 - Two members of Council raised questions about space utilization--both in terms of class scheduling and in terms of the practice of housing half of the freshman class on the Newton Campus. It was noted that many students come to enjoy the residential arrangement on the Newton Campus, and that more could be done on both Newton and Upper Campus to, create a seamless culture that integrates residential life and intellectual life.
3. Henry Humphreys, Director of the Office of Residential Life, provided an update about the residence halls and efforts to enhance residential learning. Ultimately, students will be housed for all four years on campus (currently three of the four classes are housed on campus). In the past, residence halls have been viewed as social communities; now, the plans for residence halls include programming for more spaces to create learning communities.

- It was remarked that faculty going into residence halls for talks, meetings, or other events have found the experience somewhat artificial. Students need and desire activities that will draw them out of their dorm rooms and pull them into “community,” but these activities need to be organic, such as theme residence halls (e.g., foreign-language halls, social-justice halls, etc.) that can bring together students and faculty who are already united in part by a shared interest.
- It was noted that graduate students should also be considered as potential contributors to these learning communities.
- A Council member observed that the Cornerstone seminars have been particularly effective in bringing students together in learning communities.
- It was observed that, particularly for junior faculty, unless the university makes clear that it encourages and acknowledges faculty contributions to residential learning activities, there are few effective incentives for faculty to make greater investments in activity in the residence halls. Including an “academic core” of faculty office space, seminar rooms, etc. in each residence hall is a concept that should be investigated. Appropriate housing for faculty in or near residence halls is another possibility. Council members noted that among faculty there is significant interest in becoming involved with students, but that resources--particularly time--remain scarce. The university could show its commitment by asking faculty to report their participation in residential learning programs on the faculty member’s annual report.
- A comment was made that students harbor a concern that residential learning communities will encroach on their ability to relax. It was stated that generally, residential learning communities are voluntary and populated by students who self-select.

4. Provost's Report

The Provost announced that the Statutes have been reviewed over the summer. BC is unique in having definitional statements as well as procedural details--which no other institution includes in its Statutes. Discussion has begun on de-coupling the procedural details, which may be put into a faculty handbook.