

# Student Academic Support Committee Annual Report 2008-2009

Joel W. Russell, Chair

## 2008-2009 Members

Faculty: Buck Dillon  
Derek Hastings  
Suha Kridli  
Peg Roytek  
Joel Russell  
Anne Switzer  
Students: Steve Clark  
Tom Cruz  
Advisors: Julie Dermidoff  
AP/Adm.: Mary Beth Snyder  
Glenn McIntosh  
Steve Shablin

The Senate Steering Committee sent no items or requests to the SASC for action during 2008-2009. Nevertheless, the committee requested AP directors of programs providing academic support for Oakland students to provide the committee an overview of their activities. These presentations occurred during two fall semester meetings and one winter semester meeting. A summary of these meetings is presented below and minutes for the three meetings are attached.

The SASC members who attended the three 2008-2009 meetings were distressed at the lack of attendance by students and administrators. It is difficult to carry out our charge "to promote the academic success of students by considering, evaluating, and recommending policies and procedures in areas of advising, financial aid, registration, admissions, student life, career development, and any other areas of student academic interest that may be brought before it" without representation from students and the administration. We believe our first order of business should be to address concerns of students and thus need to hear from students.

## Summary of October 17, 2008 meeting

Presentation by Sherry Wynn Perdue, Director of Writing Center

The center served 769 students the previous semester. Center staff assists students with writing assignments by first addressing higher-level issues before considering detail issues such as grammar. Another service of the center is to assist faculty in clarifying assignments that confuse students. The committee strongly supports the Writing Center.

Presentation by Holly Kerstner, Assistant Director of Athletics

Most of the discussion considered the implementation and assessment of the Excused Absence Policy the committee had recommended and Senate approved two years ago. Ms. Kerstner estimates that 95% of faculty are following the approved policy with missed quizzes and exams the largest issue. After reviewing the letter athletes present to faculty at the start of each term, the committee suggested a few revisions. The committee also expressed concerns about (1) the number of missed classes due to travel time required by the geographic area of the Summit League and (2) the scheduling of competitions during the final week of a term and exam periods. If faculty are not allowed to schedule exams during the final week in order to allow study time for finals, why should the coaches be allowed to schedule competitions during that period.

### **Summary of November 14, 2008 Meeting**

Presentation by Jocelyn Bennett-Garraway, Interim Director, Academic Skill Center

Ms. Bennett-Garraway discussed the mission of the ASC and the required biweekly meetings with students on probation. Last year, of the 543 students on academic probation, 28% made it to good standing, 52% remained on probation, and 19% were dismissed. Freshmen living in the residence halls are the most at risk for academic failure—it is difficult for them to prioritize and adjust to new freedoms. SASC members were surprised to learn that many Honors College students use the ASC to help maintain the GPA needed in the honors program. The most important issues facing the ASC are funding, space, qualified staff, and fair salaries. (OCC pays their tutors 2x what we pay ours.)

Presentation by Eleanor Reynolds, Assistant VP Student Affairs

A 3.2 high school overall GPA or core-class GPA is required for normal admission although many students are admitted with lower GPAs since the average GPA for all freshmen is 3.2. Increased use is being made of ACT scores for applicants with GPAs lower than 3.2. The average ACT score of Oakland freshmen is 22. Students with marked differences between GPA and ACT scores are usually admitted only after interviews with Ms. Reynolds. We have changed how we award Merit Scholarships—in the past, we awarded two Presidential Scholarships but were approved to award 30 this year. We have offered this scholarship to 45 students and make it a renewable award as long as they continue to meet the criteria. The university has established tuition differential scholarships in an effort to recruit more out-of-state students. Although coaches can award scholarships to athletes with lower GPAs, most athletes qualify as scholastic achievers.

## **Summary of February 18, 2009 Meeting**

Presentation by Cindy Hermson, Director of Financial Aid

Ms. Hermson reported that 67% of students received financial aid in 2007-2008. She discussed the rationale behind the "You Can Afford This" campaign and the "No Loan Necessary" policy for freshmen entering in Fall 2009. Ms. Hermson projected that 1700-1800 of 2500 freshmen in 2009-2010 would receive an average scholarship of \$3800 from implementation of the "No Loan Necessary" policy. Ms. Hermson noted that approximately 600 students had inquired about the special assistance fund, and that around 20 students had been deemed eligible to receive funds. (These students received an average of \$2,300 in assistance). Ms. Hermson also stated that a small emergency fund exists to help especially needy students with textbook purchases.

The committee expressed a concern to Ms. Hermson that the "You Can Afford This" campaign might adversely affect the image of the university making it seem like a bargain basement option. (Students via articles and letters in the OU Post this past year expressed this same sentiment. Recent billboards appear to show a new theme for the 2009-2010.) The committee wishes to be on record in requesting that future recruitment campaigns not be initiated without review by the University Senate and Student Congress.

An even greater need for review is demanded for changes in financial aid policies such as establishment of the "No Loan Necessary" policy. This policy is estimated to cost \$6.5-\$6.8 million for 2009-2010. The total new costs are this number minus whatever scholarships freshmen would have received under our former policies. If the actual new cost is half this amount, this policy results in all students paying 6% higher tuition. What tuition increase will be required to continue this policy for 2009 freshmen as they continue their studies at Oakland? Will we drop this policy in 2010 and make only those born in 1991 the lucky ones? How could such a shift in budget allocations have been made without review by the Senate Budget Committee as well as the SASC?

## **STUDENT ACADEMIC SUPPORT COMMITTEE**

### **Meeting of October 17, 2008**

Present: Joel Russell, chair, Julie Dermidoff, Buck Dillon, Derek Hastings, Suha Kridli,  
Steve Shablin, Anne Switzer

Guests: Sherry Wynn Perdue, Director of the Writing Center

Holly Kerstner, Assistant Director of Athletics

The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m.

After discussion, the committee agreed to share minute-taking for the meetings. Buck Dillon volunteered for the first meeting.

Chairman Russell distributed copies of the Committee Charge and the Committee Membership. See attached. Also, the individual members of the committee, per the Senate website, are listed on the attached.

Sherry Wynn Perdue, director of the OU Writing Center, was invited to discuss the mission and activities of the Writing Center. The mission is to be the "Write Space on campus for all students and faculty". This semester, the writing center has served 769 students. In assisting a student, the staff begins with higher-level issues (objective of the paper, etc.), then addresses details such as grammar. The center staff is also available for faculty consultation, to assist faculty in clarifying assignments. In fact, the center director may contact faculty about assignments that students find unclear. Faculty members are generally responsive, with exceptions. The committee was supportive of the Writing Center, including consultation with faculty.

Holly Kerstner addressed the Excused Absence Policy recently adopted by the Senate. In general, the policy is working, with limited exceptions. Only about 5% of faculty members are not following the excused absence policy. The biggest issue remains missing exams and quizzes. The letters and forms presented to faculty members at the beginning of the semester were reviewed, and some language suggestions were made. One major concern is the travel time required for our athletic teams, given the geographic diversity of the Summit League.

The next meeting was set for Friday, November 14, at 1:15 p.m. at 264 SEB.

Respectfully submitted  
Buck Dillon

## **Student Academic Support Committee**

Friday, November 14, 2008

Present: Joel Russell (chair), Buck Dillion, Derek Hastings, Suha Kridli, Anne Switzer

Guests: Jocelyn Bennett-Garraway (Interim Director, Academic Skill Center), Eleanor Reynolds (Assistant VP Student Affairs)

Meeting Secretary: Anne Switzer

The meeting convened at 1:20pm.

Motion to approve past minutes: Suha Kridli, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Anne Switzer

### **Academic Skill Center**

Jocelyn Bennett-Garraway (Interim Director, Academic Skill Center (ASC)) here to discuss the ASC—its mission and impact:

\*The mission of the ASC is to teach students study skills, help students to become independent learners, offer course specific help, help students to manage their time wisely, to help the transition to college go smoothly, provide support through face-to-face communications, (biweekly mtgs. are required for those students on probation—such students also must attend workshops and other supplemental help sessions).

\*Students are encouraged to make tutoring a regular part of their studying routines—many Honors College students regularly use the center as a way to maintain their high GPAs in their more difficult classes—so students are not necessarily at a crisis point when they come to the ASC.

\*The ASC staffs two full time consultants, a graduate intern, plus 64 student tutors trained by ASC staff (student tutors must have a 3.0 GPA and high faculty recommendations).

\*Last year, of the 543 students on academic probation, 28% made it to good standing, 52% remained on probation, and 19% were dismissed.

\* The ASC did not work with all 543 students who were on probation—they do, however, encourage such students to get help—a hold is placed on a failing student's registration; a student on probation, must have the ASC approve their courses; the number of classes such students can take is limited; if on probation, a student is not eligible to play on athletic teams; also, they lose eligibility for financial aid.

\*Freshmen living in the residence halls are the most at risk for academic failure—it is difficult for them to prioritize and adjust to new freedoms.

*Question Joel Russell:* Is there a difference between the type of students who are living in the residence halls and those who are commuting? Are they working more hours at a job?

*Eleanor Reynolds:* There are more students from outside Oakland County living in the residence halls—some are less prepared academically because of the high schools they've graduated. They often have to work more than one job to afford on-campus housing.

Peer tutoring:

\*The ASC recruits students with high academic excellence—seeking students from the dean's list.

\*The relationship between the peer tutor and the student seeking help is beneficial to both; the ASC tries to market the program to faculty directly—they can encourage their top students to tutor and their struggling students to seek assistance—but even the students who are high achievers benefit from sharpening their study skills.

\*The ASC offers access to an online math tutor—students can ask questions through IM or drop box; the service is manned by graduate students & faculty; this is a Moodle based program—last year 3 or 4% of students utilized this service.

\*The most important issues facing the ASC are funding, space, qualified staff, and fair salaries (OCC pays their tutors 2x what we pay ours).

## **Admissions**

Eleanor Reynolds (Assistant VP Student Affairs)

Admissions criteria:

\*3.2 GPA is required for regular admissions; a student with a HS GPA of below 3.2 can have their GPA recalculated to include core classes only or to include music or arts (if that is their intended major); extra credit is given for AP classes to determine scholarships.

\* Because of the variations between high schools, and because of grade inflation, ACT scores are required as part of a student's application, however, the ACT is not used as a benchmark (Eleanor has been using it more than it has been used by previous directors); the average OU student's ACT score is 22, 3.2 is the average GPA; OU's denial rate is 30% higher than last year—19-20% of those applying were rejected (over 10,000 applied).

\*"Fringe students": If there is a marked imbalance between a student's GPA and ACT score, then the student will generally be brought in to meet with Eleanor personally—they can be conditionally admitted and their progression watched; if by January, they're on track, then they are allowed to fully matriculate.

*Question, Derek Hastings:* Is there pressure to improve our ranking or enrollment?

*ER:* No. But several initiatives have raised the caliber of students OU has been able to attract.

\*During Eleanor's tenure, we have changed how we award Merit Scholarships—in the past, we awarded 2 Presidential Scholarships—we were approved to award 30 this year. We have offered this scholarship to 45 students—we were also able to make it a renewable award—as long as they continue to meet the criteria.

\*Tuition differential scholarship has been established to help cover the discrepancy for out-of-state students.

\*Coaches can also award scholarships—they can award to students with lower GPAs—but most athletic scholarship students are also scholastic achievers.

\* OU is looking to increase our out-state market—and out of tri-county area.

\*International students—this is an important recruitment objective—starting with Canada.

\*International students are accepted using the same admissions criteria—plus the TOFEL score—conditional admission is allowed but only to take ESL.

*Submitted by Anne Switzer*

## **Student Academic Support Committee**

Minutes Meeting of 18 February 2009

Present: Joel Russell, Buck Dillon, Derek Hastings, Julie Dermidoff, Cindy Hermson.

Meeting convened at 12:05 p.m.

Cindy Hermson, Director of Financial Aid, distributed an information packet and made a presentation to the committee regarding financial aid initiatives at Oakland. She began on a general level by noting that the percentage of OU students receiving some form of financial aid has increased dramatically over the past 12 years – from 32% of students in 1996/97 to 67% of students in 2007/08. More specifically, Ms. Hermson said her remarks would focus primarily on the most recent financial aid initiatives.

Regarding the university's recent "You Can Afford This" campaign, Ms. Hermson noted that OU publicity has focused overwhelmingly on affordability in order to attract more students who may be forced to remain in southeastern Michigan due to the economic downturn. Part of this campaign has been dubbed the university's "Economic Stimulus Plan," which includes a substantial increase in merit based scholarships (such as the Presidential Scholar and Distinguished Scholar programs for students with high ACT scores). Additionally, for freshmen entering in Fall 2009, OU has instituted a "No Loans Necessary" policy, which means that after all gift aid (including Pell Grants) and the expected parent contributions are added up, Oakland will make up the difference so that students will not have to take out student loans.

Mr. Hastings asked what the average award amount was projected to be per student. Ms. Hermson replied that the average would be around \$3,800 per student. Mr. Dillon asked how many freshmen would likely receive this money, and Ms. Hermson said that the current estimate is between 1,700-1,800 students (out of an incoming freshman class of 2,500). Ms. Dermidoff asked whether Macomb-to-Oakland students would be eligible, and Ms. Hermson stated that they would be eligible, but only for classes they are paying OU tuition for. Mr. Russell then noted OU's policy of dropping all student fees and asked how many Michigan universities had done something similar. Ms. Hermson replied that OU is the only university in the state to drop all fees, noting also that other Michigan universities average \$834 in fees per year.

Ms. Hermson then continued her presentation, discussing OU's push to attract veterans and the need to direct students to the funding available from the State of Michigan through the "Michigan Works" program. In light of the "no loans" policy for incoming freshmen, Ms. Hermson noted that returning OU students are eligible for the "Special Assistance Fund" that was established for students struggling with finances. Ms. Hermson noted that approximately 600 students had inquired about the special assistance fund, and that around 20 students had been deemed eligible to receive funds (these students received an average of \$2,300 in assistance). Ms. Hermson also stated that a small emergency fund exists to help especially needy students with textbook purchases.

Mr. Dillon asked what students had to do to maintain their eligibility for aid, and Ms. Hermson answered that students had to maintain a 2.0 GPA and complete at least 67% of the classes they attempted. Mr. Hastings expressed concern that the emphasis on affordability in the "You Can Afford This" campaign might adversely affect the image of the university (making it seem like a bargain basement option), and Ms. Hermson replied that the publicity campaign was also emphasizing the quality of an OU education. Ms. Dermidoff asked about the impact of the new year-long registration policy on this financial aid campaign, and Ms. Hermson answered that there would not be a negative impact. Mr. Dillon asked about the possibility of Federal Aid to higher education being cut, and Ms. Hermson noted that the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act was good, but that the Pell Grant (currently set at \$4,731) had failed to keep pace with inflation.

The committee thanked Ms. Hermson for her presentation.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Derek Hastings.