Alfred University Parents Association  
Advisory Board Meeting  
September 22, 2012  

Minutes

Call to Order
Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. She welcomed everyone and asked all to introduce themselves. Other members present were Jennifer and Paul Lange, Melissa and Steve Delmonte, Allison Bishop-White, Kate Parr and Town Downie. New members who joined us for this meeting were Sue and Bill Arduino, Jerome Duncan, Debra Kleinberg, and Tom Loop. University administrators present were: Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; Corry Unis, Director of Admissions; and Melody Mc Lay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Parents Association President’s Report
Katie thanked everyone for coming and expressed appreciation to the University administrators for taking time out of their busy weekends to join us. Melody explained that one of our invited guests, Giovina Lloyd - Vice President for Business and Finance, was unable to attend, but has provided a written update on summer residence hall projects and Ade Hall renovations.

Katie reported that there were surprisingly few messages posted to the auparent2parent Yahoo groups this year. She asked if all the new members were aware of the Yahoo chat groups. The response was that they were not. Katie explained that the purpose of the Yahoo groups is for information sharing - for posting questions and concerns and getting answers and advice from other parents and from AU administrators. She went on to mention some of the issues that have been addressed in the past. Examples included the course registration process, advising, health care, finding rides home for students without cars, etc. Melody said she would send information on joining the Yahoo group to Advisory Board members and to other parents who gave her their email addresses at check-in. It was also mentioned that it would be helpful if the Yahoo groups were combined, so parents of current students could more readily assist parents of incoming students. Currently we have 2 groups, one for parents of current students, and one for parents of accepted students. (Follow up: After the meeting, Melody contacted Jodi and passed along these questions and suggestions. Jodi indicated that she was surprised more parents were not aware of the Yahoo group. She sends emails to students asking them to let their parents know; has flyers in the lobby of Alumni Hall; talks about it at the accepted student open houses; has information about it on AU’s accepted student web page; and mails them information. Jodi said that there are two Yahoo groups because each serves a different audience, with different concerns and questions. The one for parents of accepted students is used to provide information, give them an opportunity to share experiences and concerns, and, hopefully, help them feel that AU is the absolute right place for their child. Members of the Parents Advisory Board should receive invitations each year to join this group so they can help us answer questions and provide words of encouragement and reassurance.

Not all of the accepted students actually end up coming here, so not all of the parents in that group become parents of current students. Those who do are moved to the other group – for parents of current students – in the fall after their children begin their studies here. At that time, Jodi asks them if they would also like to remain members of the new student group, to help the parents of students who will enter the University next year.)
It was suggested that we use a Face Book page or a wiki website, instead of the Yahoo groups. Melody checked with Jodi last spring regarding Face Book and Jodi explained that they didn’t use Face Book because they wanted the messages to be viewable by AU parent members and administrators only, to protect the privacy of the parents and students.

There were some comments regarding possible ways to use Face Book and keep the postings private and also suggestions for using a wiki website. (Follow-up: Melody passed along these suggestions to Jodi. She indicated again that a Face Book page is too public. There is a way to safeguard some of the information on Face Book, but she still worries about some of it being available. Plus, we would run into the same issues with inviting/adding people to the group because if we set the privacy tight people would not be able to just ‘find’ it. Maybe people just aren’t overly familiar with using Yahoo groups, but if we can get the information out better, perhaps more would join. It is vital that we protect the privacy of the parents so they can feel free to express their feelings and concerns without the whole world being able to access them. Safety issues also come into play when parents are, for example, looking for rides for their children – indicating their names and where they live. For general questions, however, parents should feel free to use the Alfred University Face Book page. Jodi also monitors that page, along with the Acting Director of Communications, so the parents definitely would receive answers to their questions that way also. It just isn’t a forum for parents to communicate directly with other parents. Jodi said she wasn’t familiar with how the wiki pages work, so she couldn’t speak to that. Melody has invited Jodi to come to our spring meeting to discuss this topic with us in person.)

Katie went on to say that the University had a very successful first-year student check-in. At the parents table in McLane and, later, in the lobby of Harder Hall, a total of 400 Handbooks were distributed personally to parents of new students by Parents Advisory Board volunteers.

Katie then introduced Corry Unis, Director of Admissions.

**Admissions Report**

Corry explained that he was asked to come to our meeting to address questions about the University’s recruitment efforts. Admissions procedures have changed quite a lot over the years. It used to be that schools would have to contact students, but now students are searching online and contacting the schools, as well. At AU we have implemented a 21st century approach to recruiting, and the number of first-year students has increased in the three years Corry has been here.

One question posed at our spring board meeting was “Why isn’t AU more well-known throughout the country?” The University used to use a “shot-gun approach” to recruiting – sending information out to students in different pockets of the country, randomly. Now, however, we are taking a more strategic approach – finding areas with high concentrations of students who fit the profile we know we can be successful with and focusing most of our efforts and resources on those areas.

Most of our students come from the northeast corridor. We have identified primary, secondary and tertiary markets and concentrate counselor contacts, travel, events, etc. in those markets.

Our primary markets – our “bread and butter” – are all in New York State, so most of our recruitment budget is spent here. Students tend to stay in state and already have a built-in knowledge of Alfred. Primary markets include Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, the Southern Tier, Albany, the Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island. 71% of this year’s new students are from our primary markets.

Our secondary markets include the rest of New York State, northern New England (Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine), Boston, the rest of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and north/central Pennsylvania. In secondary markets we also devote a considerable amount of time and money to recruiting, including having a counselor in that region, doing off-campus interviews, and having receptions for prospective students.
Tertiary markets are areas from which we don’t normally draw many students, but areas in which we want to build. We might not have off-campus interviews there or receptions, but those are areas we are trying to convert into secondary markets. Our tertiary markets include the rest of Pennsylvania, northern New Jersey, the rest of New Jersey, Columbus, Cleveland, west & northwest of Washington DC (MD & VA), Baltimore, Chicago, southern California, Seattle and Portland.

Q: Is NY unique in that most students stay within the state?  
A: No, this is the case in most states, especially since the stock market went down. In this economy, students tend to stay closer to home.

NY is broken down into different markets, depending upon population and other factors. We recruit everywhere around the suburban areas in the northeast corridor, also northeast and central Ohio. We also recruit in the Chicago area (northern and western suburbs). Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon are the furthest locations to which our recruiters will travel this year.

Southern California is also an area of interest, but due to the expense and amount of time related to that type of travel, we can’t cover that area at this time.

Q: Are family members of current students ever asked to help out at area receptions?  
A: Yes. We involve alumni, members of the University Relations Office staff, and a few parents of current students. AU trustees assist greatly by attending, speaking and sponsoring many of the events.

Q: How do you choose locations for receptions?  
A: We choose the areas from which we get most of our deposits. The specific venue for an event is chosen based upon the number of prospective/accepted students in the area and the convenience/accessibility of the location.

We are proud of where we are located, and the quality of our school. We recruit all students the same way. Recruitment must be done ethically.

We do the best recruiting we can with the resources we have. This year’s class is the 3rd largest, and the average SAT scores are up 16 points over last year’s entering class.

Q: What is the attrition rate?  
A: Retention is a big topic of discussion here on campus. It has been in the 70-75% range, but is definitely something the University is working on improving. Nationally, the average retention rate for a school that offers both undergraduate and graduate level programs is around 60%.

**Vice President for Student Affairs Report**  
Kathy Woughter reported that we had an incredible opening this semester. So far, she hasn’t been awakened in the middle of the night by any emergency phone calls, and the number of judicial incidents has been very low. The first-year students have been behaving well – having fun, but, following the rules and staying safe - so it has really been great.

In order to get a more complete picture of how things are going, she checked with Residence Life staff and faculty to get their perceptions of how the first-year students are doing. There has been an increase in student involvement, use of campus services and joining of clubs and organizations. Faculty are reporting that students are making eye contact more, engaging in class more, paying attention etc., so that is all good, too. We realize there may be problems later in the semester with students who test limits, but things are going well so far.

The only problems seem to be in the area of roommate relationships. There’s been an increase in the number of students requesting changes. This is particularly difficult this year because the halls are really full, so we’re not able to make switches as quickly as the students may expect. This has been challenging. Residence Life staff are encouraging students to give it a little more time; to try to resolve conflicts and work out differences, if possible.
Kathy then updated the group on recent campus improvements. Ade Hall is being renovated. The project was supposed to be done in mid-August, but it isn’t quite ready yet. It already looks gorgeous downstairs, but the upstairs isn’t finished. For example, the lighting fixtures have not yet arrived. We don’t want to open until all the work is completed. They recently got a great pasta machine from Italy and they’ve been testing it out — trying different recipes. They also got a smoker, and a gelato machine. The whole dessert station will be new. There is also a new station called Pure - a vegetarian, raw station. This station will offer delicious raw food – beautifully presented. There will be a Pure entrée at every lunch and every dinner.

Comment: Katie said her daughter mentioned that the dining services staff is doing a great job in Powell to accommodate the students there while Ade Dining Hall is off-line.  

Q: During this time, can students take food from dining hall?  
A: Dining services can provide boxed lunches as well as boxed dinners and breakfasts. Also, the retail facility in Ade is open all day, so that helps, too.

It is important to note that the Ade Hall renovations are being conducted by the University, so it isn’t the Dining Service's fault. Everyone has been great in working through this; the students have been very cooperative.

The AU Fitness Center will soon have brand new, up-to-date equipment. The new Athletic Director, Paul Vecchio, was able to make arrangements with a leasing company so, from now on, the Fitness Center equipment will be leased and will be updated every three years. The new equipment should be in place very soon.

The new softball field, next to the tennis courts, should be completed by December.

Some of the women’s locker rooms in McLane were renovated over the summer. Now the students won’t have to share those spaces with faculty and staff.

Work on the McLane Annex is progressing on schedule and we hope to open it in August of next year. It will be a large space – a very basic arrangement with courts that can be used for basketball, volleyball or tennis, and a smaller, multi-purpose room that can be used for exercise classes and other activities. We’ve needed this for a long time.

Q: A few students would like to start a wrestling club but they don’t have mats. Can the University provide those?  
A: Anyone who wants to start a club can go to the Director of Student Activities and the Student Senate to request funds. There is money to help support student clubs & organizations in the Student Senate budget.

We are having the second annual Horse-to-Holler Hike on Saturday, September 29th, to promote the great outdoors and highlight the beauty of this area. It is a 7-mile hike that goes from the Equestrian Center through state forests, the Foster Lake property and some personal property that owners have opened to us, and ends up at Pollywog Holler. There will be refreshment stations along the way, including a s’mores station that Kathy will be staffing. Hikers will be bused back to the Equestrian Center or the campus.

This year, we asked parents of first-year students to complete a survey following Parents Orientation. We wanted to evaluate the check-in process and orientation program and get feedback from participants.

There were 60 respondents. Most of the parents liked the check-in process and rated it highly. Most agreed that the staff members were friendly and helpful and that the event was well-organized. Several mentioned how great the football players were in assisting with moving everything into the residence halls.

We also asked about the Parents Orientation program. Some of the respondents said they would have liked to receive more information on financial issues, academic issues (faculty expectations, course scheduling etc.), career development services, student outcomes, residence life (activities, campus life), counseling, privacy concerns (i.e. what AU staff can and can’t discuss with parents re: their students), judicial issues, and campus security.
Kathy said the parents should feel free to contact her if they have any questions.

**Update on Summer Residence Hall Renovations & Cleaning/Repairs**
Vice President Giovina Lloyd was unable to attend the meeting, but provided a written update which was presented to the Board by Melody McLay.

As Kathy Woughter reported earlier in the meeting, the Ade Hall project is progressing. The downstairs has been renovated to accommodate lounge seating and offer a space for casual eating. There will be a fireplace and TV’s in the space when complete. The work upstairs was focused on bringing some of the back-of-the-house operations forward so students could see the food preparation. A firm date on when the dining operation will resume has not yet been determined. The last of the lighting, which is holding up the project, is due to arrive early next week. The AVI staff has been testing the equipment in preparation for the opening. We are hopeful that the lighting will go up quickly and use of the facility can begin the first part of October.

Renovations in Cannon and Barresi halls were completed this summer, due in part to a grant from HECap. The projects totaled just over $1 million. The project scope included bathroom renovation, sprinkler installation, new hallway flooring, fire alarm system and ceiling lighting.

The cleaning checklist Giovina mentioned at our spring meeting has been established and things are progressing well. While extra staffing was brought in to accommodate some of the last minute push, there were still a few glitches. We have noticed some areas where we need to make modifications in the hall inspections prior to the arrival of students and are working to establish a better process for next year.

**Issues/Topics to Discuss at Spring Meeting – April 27, 2013**
Suggestion: It would be helpful if someone from the Career Development Center could come speak about the current job market, internships, career services available to students, etc. Melody said she would invite the Director of Career Development to present this information at our spring meeting.

Suggestion: Next fall we should schedule the Career Development Center internship workshop at 11:00 so parents who attend the Annual Meeting can also get to the internship presentation. This year the two events conflicted.

**Adjournment**
The meeting adjourned at 9:40 a.m.