Alfred University Parents Association
Advisory Board Meeting
September 21, 2013

Minutes

Call to Order
Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. She welcomed everyone and asked all to introduce themselves. Other members present were Allison Bishop-White, Debra Ordoqui, Kate Parr and Tom Downie, Mr. and Mrs. Ismael Garcia, and Deborah Kleinberg. Prospective new members who joined us for this meeting were Melissa Jarkowski, David and Jen Kuhn, Linda Jones, Jennifer Stine, Marianne Tolomeo and Karin Reed. University administrators present were: Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; John Dietrich, Director of Dining Services; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Parents Association President’s Report
Katie thanked everyone for coming and reported that the AU Parent2Parent Yahoo Group has had a very active season. The group serves as a nice resource for parents, many of whom have the same concerns. A lot of the issues raised in the group have been resolved over the past several years. One example is advisement. There were some concerns about the faculty-student advising process, and that process was improved. Katie went on to invite everyone to stay after this meeting for the larger, Parents Association Annual Meeting.

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

Vice President for Student Affairs Report
Kathy Woughter welcomed everyone and said it was a pleasure to have this opportunity to talk about the highlights of fall semester opening and to answer any questions the parents might have. The University is implementing a lot of changes this fall. In fact, Kathy said that in the 10 years she has been Vice President, there hasn’t been another year in which so many changes were made.

Housing: One of the biggest changes is in the Residence Life housing policy. We used to designate some residence halls for first-year students only, and others were just for upper class students. Now first years can sign up to be in nearly all of the residence halls. (In this week’s Fiat Lux, the cover story is about these changes and the fact that most students are very happy about them.) The addition of Room Sync was also a positive change. More than half of the new students took advantage of this, and, to date, only one of those pairings didn’t work out and had to be switched. Students take more ownership when they make the choice themselves. Now that most of our residence halls contain both first-year and upper class students, we’ve also had to change the way we train our RAs. They now have to know how to work with, relate to, and assist new and continuing students.
Athletics: The recent addition of the two new mascots has really helped increase school spirit at sports events. The mascots are a horse and rider (Alden is the horse; the rider is Alfred the Great) dressed in traditional Saxon garb, and Little Alf. There is also 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. We also reinvigorated the Captains Council, partnering with the Judson Leadership Center, to teach student captains how to be good leaders and interact effectively with their coaches and teammates. Construction on the new Recreation Center attached to McLane is ongoing. We don’t know for sure exactly when it will be ready to open. We initially thought it would be sometime in November, but are now looking at January.

Dining Services: There was recently an article in the on-line Fiat Lux saying that students love the changes made to Powell which created a new retail food area. In order to accommodate the students wishing to use this retail operation, we had to make changes to the meal plans. We knew that these plans might need to be tweaked a bit, because they are brand new and we had to see how they would work for the students. John Dietrich, Director of Dining Services, will address concerns in his report.

Clubs: Student club memberships are way up this fall, especially in clubs that have something to do with the outdoors. For example, one of our signature programs – an outdoor hike called Horse-to-Holler, is particularly popular. 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. We already have 100 people signed up and we haven’t even really begun advertising. The attendance needs to be capped at 150, and we will have no problem filling it up this year.

Judson Leadership Center: Our recent Women’s Conference on Safety was great – very successful and well-attended.

Wellness Center: This past summer we were pleased to welcome Dr. Stanley Tam, our new Wellness Center Director. He is doing a great job and both the Counseling Center and Health Center are being well-used by the students. We’re finding that more students are using the Counseling Center than in past fall semesters.

On the not-so-positive side, we’ve had some very busy weekends – lots of parties and some behavioral issues. Our Residence Hall staff is really cracking down - everyone has been very busy handling this. 99% of the activity is due to students testing their limits. Last year we had a very quiet semester start, but this year there is a lot more activity in the halls. She doesn’t feel this is a scary trend, just more activity than we’ve had in the past couple of years.

Kathy then asked John Dietrich to provide information regarding Dining Services and meal plans.

Dining Services Information
John Dietrich reported that he came to AU in 1997 from the University of Rochester (where he had been for 12 years). He ran the Powell Dining Hall for 8 years and then, in 2005, he became the Director of Dining Services. Shortly after AVI became the dining service provider here at AU in 2005, they enlisted a group of students to meet together to discuss meal plans. In 2006 they made some changes to the existing plans and came up with the meal plans we had until last year. The plans were fairly simple and straight-forward. During that time, however, the students
also did research at other colleges and found that there were lots of schools, even larger than AU, that ran their dining service with just one traditional all-you-care-to-eat dining hall and several retail outlets. Working with these students, and others, AVI and AU came up with the plan to convert Powell Dining Hall to a large retail operation.

When AVI first got here, it was a company that strived for freshness. Then a new AVI Vice President joined the company, changed the name to “AVI Fresh,” and the delivery of the freshest food possible became an even higher priority. At that time, here at AU, we didn’t have all the equipment needed to make some of the fresh food items, but last year we renovated Ade Hall and now have a lot of new equipment and can do things in a fresher way. For example, we bake our own bread, roast our own turkeys, grind peanuts for peanut butter, make fresh pasta every day (with a pasta maker from Italy), and make 12 different flavors of gelato every day with our own gelato maker. We also now have a smoker and recently made smoked salmon. There is also a station called PURE in Ade – a vegetarian, raw food station – which is very popular with many students. We wanted to get away from the “food line” concept. Entrees are presented on nice white plates. We have had to tweak a few things, experiment with portion sizes, etc., but things now seem to be going well.

We’re trying to provide as many fresh, made-from-scratch items as possible. We even hand-bread our chicken tenders in Powell.

In Powell we have 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.)

Meal Plans: When we decided to convert to the retail operation in Powell we realized we needed to re-work the meal plans. We used student input and feedback in designing the plans. For example, we originally thought Ade would be the facility open on weekends, but students said they preferred to have Powell open on the weekends. (We typically don’t have a large 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 just Monday through Friday and included Saxon Swipes in the plans so students could also eat on the weekends in Powell.

We found that there was some confusion because the King Alfred Plan indicates unlimited meals in Ade Hall. Some students and parents thought that meant 7 days a week, but actually it is just Mon-Fri. Also, Saxon swipes were initially designed to be used for weekend meals, but students told us they wanted to be able to use them all the time. In the past we found that, on average, most students didn’t eat more than 2 or 3 meals in the dining hall each weekend. So, the number of Saxon Swipes built into each plan was based on that. Unfortunately, students who eat 3 meals a day on the weekend are running low on Saxon Swipes. We have learned a lot over the past few weeks and realize we will have to tweak the plans for the spring semester. In the meantime, if any students are out of swipes, or low on swipes by mid-semester, they can just email John and he will put more swipes on their cards so they can get through ‘til the end of the semester. He will also advise them on how to manage their swipes better in the future. Parents should feel free email John at jdietrich@avifoodsystems.com if they have any questions or problems.
**Q:** Is there any way for students to see how many meals or dollars they have left on their cards?

A: They can tell every time they swipe their card, or can just ask at the register for this to be checked.

**Comment:** There should be a mechanism for students to understand exactly what a swipe is equal to. They don’t always understand how much money is being taken from the card when they swipe in. For example, a student might swipe in Ade and just eat a banana. But the swipe equals a whole meal and that is the amount of money deducted from their account.

**Comment:** It wasn’t made clear enough to parents exactly what was included in the plans and what would be best for their student. This should be explained better.

**Comment:** Students also aren’t sure who they should contact to make changes.

The Office of Res Life handles the room and board billing charges, so they also handle the changes in the meal plans. Students have until the Friday of the first week of classes to make a change. You can also change the plan for the spring semester.

**Q:** At the end of this semester will the students or parents get a report showing what was spent?

A: No, but students or parents can call the Dining Services office and they will tell them.

**Q:** What exactly are Fiat Bux and how do they differ from Dining Dollars?

A: A couple of years ago the University asked Dining Services to come up with a way for students to use their swipe cards to purchase items in the Clay Store, the Press of the Dingbat, the copiers in Scholes and Herrick Libraries, and the Bookstore. They created Fiat Bux for this. Fiat Bux can be used for food, but also for these other purchases. Dining Dollars can only be used for food, and additional Dining Dollars cannot be purchased, but you can buy more Fiat Bux if needed.

**Q:** How do you accommodate students with food allergies?

A: Our Executive Chef will meet with the student and go over the menus and make sure they get what they need. They always have gluten-free products available and alternative options for lactose intolerant students.

Lydia Becker who runs Powell Dining Hall is putting together a vegetarian-vegan group to make sure we provide enough selections for them, as well. Vegetarian options are usually located near the option containing meat, e.g. there will be chicken parmesan on the line, but, next to that, there will also be eggplant parmesan. There are also usually 3 salad choices available at every lunch and dinner meal. Lydia can be reached at lbecker@avifoodsystems.com

**Q:** We congratulate you on all the effort that goes into making everything from scratch. Does this lower food costs?

A: Yes, but it increases labor costs. Everything in our bakery is baked from scratch and the pizza dough is made from scratch. (Breads are made from frozen dough, due to the volume needed, but they are baked fresh daily.)

**Q:** Does a Saxon Swipe get the student a whole meal?

A: In Powell a Saxon Swipe gets you an entrée (i.e. sandwich or wrap), any side or whole fruit, a
beverage and 2 cookies. Students can also use their Saxon Swipes to pay for guest meals in Ade, which is all-you-care-to-eat.

Q: What if they just want a bagel?
A: That would be a good time to use Dining Dollars.

Q: Do you take cash?
A: Yes, we take cash or credit card. But if students use Fiat Bux, no tax is charged, so for students not on a food plan, it is smart to buy some. Saxon Swipes don’t carry over from fall to spring, but Dining Dollars and Fiat Bux do. (They do not carry over after Commencement, though.)

John also provided a handout regarding the AU “Gifts from Home” program. He asked everyone to look at what is currently offered, and if they would like to suggest something be added to the list of selections, to please let him know.

Q: Is the S.T.E.M. program or club still active?
A: There is the Women’s Engineering Club and there is also a STEM club through the Leadership Center, which involves upper class students mentoring first-year students. Dianne Mattar is the student coordinating this program. Julia Overton-Healy, the Director of the Leadership Center, would also be a good person to contact for information.

Q: There is a Professional Women’s Forum at Corning Incorporated. Are we plugged into that? It would be a good resource.
A: The Career Development Center has a solid, ongoing relationship with Corning Inc., but Kathy will provide the appropriate contact information to the Women’s Leadership Academy so they can follow up on this.

**Issues/Topics to Discuss at Spring Meeting – April 26, 2014**

Katie thanked Kathy and John and then asked for suggestions of issues or topics to cover at our spring meeting.

_Suggestion:_ The Career Development Center does a study on placement each year (First Destinations Report) to see where students have been placed in jobs or graduate school. It would be good for parents to understand how the University is doing with that. What’s happening with our students? How and where they are being placed, how successful are they in finding jobs or getting into grad schools after graduation? This information is available on-line each fall, but it would be helpful if someone from CDC could present the information to the Board.

_Suggestion:_ There is some difficulty in using used textbooks for certain courses. Special codes are required to access further information/text, but these codes are not provided to students using used books. It would be helpful if this issue could be discussed at our Spring meeting.

_Suggestion:_ It would be helpful to understand how the University helps/supports students who are struggling with their grades. Perhaps someone from Academic Support Services can come speak to us.

**Adjournment**
The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.

9/23/13, mhm