

Alfred University Parents Association
Advisory Board Meeting
September 17, 2011

Minutes

Call to Order

Association President Katie Rommel-Esham called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m. She welcomed everyone and asked all to introduce themselves. Other members present were Melissa and Steve Delmonte, Jennifer and Paul Lange, Melissa Rinn and Jack Sillwaggon. Parents of new students who joined us for this meeting included Kate Parr and Tom Downie, Ismael Garcia, Steve and Lauren Lassman, Heather MacDonald, Kathie and Steve Read and Beth Apter. Four additional family members also attended as guests, for a total of 20.

University administrators present were: Kathy Woughter, Vice President for Student Affairs; Norm Pollard, Dean of Students; Brenda Porter, Director of Residence Life; and Melody McLay, Director of Summer School, Summer Programs and Parents Programs.

Parents Association President's Report

Katie explained that this Board serves as a go-between between parents and the University. She thanked all the parents for coming and also the University representatives who have joined us to present information. The Parent-to-Parent chat groups have been pretty active. Last year we switched from Google to Yahoo. There is a group for parents of incoming first-year students, and another group for parents of continuing students. The concerns expressed in these groups have changed over the years. In the beginning there were a lot of questions about advisement and how to register for courses. This year the concerns were a bit more mundane – what detergent is best to use in the campus washing machines, where to get the extra long sheets for the residence hall beds, what parents plan to do during Fall Family Weekend, etc.

The University has always been very responsive to parent concerns. For example, last year there was a lot of concern expressed by parents of first-year students about the on-line billing process. Students didn't always check their Alfred email accounts regularly, prior to coming to campus, and notices of bills were being overlooked. We were able to make a difference by expressing our concerns. The procedure has now changed so the first bill is a paper bill, mailed to the student's home. This makes it easier for parents to get this important information right away and respond in a timely fashion.

Katie then introduced Vice President Kathy Woughter, to give an update on Student Affairs.

Student Affairs Update

Kathy Woughter explained that, in order to allow enough time for the Residence Life and Cyber Bullying presentations, she wouldn't be giving a comprehensive report at this meeting, but will give a full report at the Parents Association Annual Meeting which follows at 10:00 a.m.

She went on to say that the University had a spectacular opening. We welcomed the largest class we have ever had. Fortunately, we had time to prepare over the summer. We wanted to make sure all had a place to live without tripling. Many schools resort to tripling when their numbers swell to more than they can easily accommodate. But we realized that tripling would create more problems, so remained firm not to go that route. No matter how carefully we prepare, however, there are unexpected things that happen which are out of our control. This year, we were surprised by hurricane Irene. In order to accommodate students whose travel plans were changed because of the hurricane, we opened our doors earlier than usual. We weren't completely ready, but wanted to assist these students by letting them come to campus early. This caused some chaos, and we

encountered some glitches due to that chaos, but, for the most part, things went well. One of the great benefits of having so many students on campus is the increase in the number of people involved in volunteer activities. More details will be shared at the next meeting.

Residence Life Update

Brenda Porter, Director of Residence Life, reported that the residence halls are very full. Each year she starts tracking student deposits in May. Normally the total number of new students goes down a bit before August. There's usually a "melt." But this year there was no melt. Of the first-year class – only 2 students who said they were coming did not show up! On top of this, we had very few *returning student* no-shows. It was a challenge, but we were able to house everyone. Brenda said she is very proud of the RAs, RDs, Public Safety officers and everyone else – including the football players – who helped with move in.

She thanked the Board members for their helpful feedback over the years. This year our Director of Student Activities, Dan Napolitano, came up with the idea of the 10-minute drop off zone for move-in day. That was in response from parent feedback from last year.

Brenda also reported on "Saxons Fall Into Service." Students in residence halls competed in their first service event of the year. They cleaned fire trucks at the Alfred Fire Station, weeded flower beds at St. Jude's church, painted fire hydrants in town, etc.

Comment: This is our third child in college and this was the smoothest and most successful move-in day ever. Thank goodness for the football team!

Comment: We also have other kids in college, but this was the smoothest move-in we have ever experienced.

Q: What is usual melt? What size first-year class is normal?

A: A first-year class of about 520 can be housed fairly easily – this year's class was 576. Other schools triple up when faced with a larger-than-normal class. We didn't want to do that. Forty-four RAs who would normally have single rooms, this year had to have roommates. We also used some space in upper class halls for first-year students.

Comment: One of the suites was in very poor condition when our daughter moved in, and not clean.

Response: Kathy Woughter responded that she was aware of this situation. A combination of unique, unforeseen circumstances led to that and University staff have been working with the students involved to remedy the situation. Kathy will meet one-on-one with this parent after the meeting to discuss this particular situation and help find closure.

Q: How are the rooms cleaned during the summer? Is there a check list? Are student workers used? If so, how are they supervised?

A: Check lists are completed when students move out of their rooms in the spring, and when they move into their rooms in the fall, but check lists aren't used by the staff during the summer. Staff from each department - plumbers, carpenters, cleaners, etc. - go through the rooms completing what needs to be done. All departments use student workers who work side-by-side with, and are supervised by, regular staff.

Melody commented that the campus is used heavily during the summer for Summer School and other special summer programs. This adds to the challenge and limits the amount of time available for deep cleaning and refurbishing of residence halls.

Comment: Challenge is also an opportunity to make changes.

Melody will invite the Vice President for Business and Finance to address this issue at our spring meeting, since the Physical Plant department is in her purview.

Brenda went on to discuss the issue of roommates. Living with someone else can be difficult, especially if a student has always had a room of his or her own. This year there really isn't the wiggle room that we normally have to make changes. Roommates don't always become best friends, but *can* learn to co-exist and be good roommates.

At this time in the semester, when students have been here for a couple of weeks, the residence halls are vibrant places with lots of activity and students connecting with each other. Brenda's staff members are challenged to help roommates have conversations and try to get along – to co-exist with mutual respect.

They are also working hard to facilitate a mutual roommate exchange in the halls if there really isn't any way to work out differences between roommates. If there is an exchange, all four students must agree to it. The RAs facilitate conversations between the students involved so they can come to a mutual agreement that we call the roommate agreement.

Comment: Our son has roommate who likes to listen to music while he sleeps. He is thinking of moving in with someone else. We will encourage him to discuss this with his RA.

Comment: Thanks to Brenda and her staff for their help with our daughter last year in getting through that process.

Katie that she has always had positive experiences with the Residence Life staff– they've been very responsive and helpful whenever there's been an issue or problem.

Report on AU's Cyber-Bullying Policy

Norm Pollard reported that cyber bullying is a fairly new phenomenon, and even having discussions at this level about bullying in general is new. Rarely would this topic be presented when we were in school, but now it is becoming a hot topic. In fact, this week the White House is hosting their third conference on bullying.

Parents have asked what the University's policies and procedures are regarding bullying. Parent interest has increased because parents are strong advocates for their children and if their child is adversely impacted by the actions of a peer, they want the school to take action. We are responsive to that.

We also want to teach students life skills to help them become self-advocates and find ways of solving problems themselves. Almost all of our students live in residence halls, so going to Residence Life staff (RA, RD) is a crucial first step. If mediation is appropriate it can begin then.

Parents can report this type of thing directly to Norm. It can also be reported on-line to **AU Report It** (accessible from my.alfred.edu). Reports can be submitted by anyone and they can identify themselves or submit the report anonymously. Also, if you are concerned about your child or another student on our campus — and you want to make sure someone knows they are struggling with an issue – you can do an **AU Care Network** report on-line (also accessible from my.alfred.edu). Norm gets these reports and will be back in touch immediately (unless, of course, the report is submitted anonymously). The response can be done officially or unofficially. If it is severe enough, law enforcement can be brought in to assist. If you are not sure, submit the report and the University's Bias Response Team can get involved and look into it. The Bias Response Team is comprised of faculty, staff and students. Even if the report is anonymous, we can still take action. For example, someone heard words shouted out in a first-year hall – disgusting, vile words. They didn't know who was shouting, but reported the incident. Someone suggested that a movie on this topic be shown in the hall. This was done in each residence hall along with a mandatory meeting with all students in first-year halls. They showed the video and had a dialog regarding this topic.

If a situation escalates to the point where it falls within the Judicial Board's purview, they will take action and a student could actually be separated from the University, if necessary. Some parents have asked why there isn't a specific code just regarding bullying – this is because it would probably have to be for repeated behavior. We don't want to wait until it is repeated. We want to address this and respond after even one instance.

Face Book and other social media outlets have created other ways of bullying – something posted on a wall can be spread very quickly. We are trying to teach students to change these behaviors. This is not just an Alfred issue, it is a national issue.

Q: Was last year's issue of fires in the dorms resolved?

A: Yes, we resolved it as best we can. No arrests were made, but we feel fairly confident that it is resolved.

Q: We know RAs get training in how to deal with bullying issues, but are other students educated in this? There are many forms of bullying – even not speaking to someone, shunning someone. Is education available to the greater student body?

A: On the first evening of First-Year Student Orientation we have a full class meeting. Norm reviews the entire code of conduct and discusses these issues. Brenda goes over the hall rules and regulations and tells them what to do if they see something or hear something or experience something, so they know what to do to report these concerns. Students are pretty open about letting us know when something is going on in their lives.

Q: What about Alfred State students? Are they allowed to come over and roam around our campus? If so, what if they break our rules?

A: Anyone who comes on our campus is responsible for following the rules of our campus - whether it be Alfred State students, or other visitors. If they are involved in behavior that breaks our rules, they are asked to leave. We liaison with Alfred State College – Norm keeps in touch with them.

Q: Are there security guards walking around to check on things?

A: Yes, Public Safety makes repeated rounds and residence hall staff makes rounds in the halls.

Comment: AU is an amazing place. We've had experience with other schools. AU is fairly unique in the things you do here, the things you offer – even this Family Weekend. It's really great. With regard to cyber bullying - we may not be as familiar with social media and how to use it, etc., but there must be people at AU who are experts on this and can teach students about social civility and how students should behave on Face Book and other similar sites.

Response: Yes, we use students' savvy to help us convey things via Face Book and also to see what students are saying to each other. We try to teach that what students post has significance. Potential employees check the Face Book accounts of prospective employees – students need to understand this. Our Career Development Center does workshops on this, as well.

Q: How many of the parents here are friends with their kids on face book? About 2/3 raised their hands.

Comment: We are impressed with how mature our son is now. He has really matured since he has been here. He's getting along with his roommate, even though he thought he was going to have a private room. We think a lot of this comes from being in the Alfred Community. We see wonderful things happening here.

Comment: The Alfred community is very inclusive. Our son feels very much a part of the community, very connected. The University is a wonderful place – a diverse community.

AU is unique in a lot of ways, and one advantage we have is that we are geographically challenged. Because of this – when we implement something we can really see the impact of it. There aren't as many distractions as there might be in a more populated area, so there's more continuity here.

Old Business

AU Parent-to-Parent Yahoo Groups: The Parent-to-Parent Yahoo Groups continue to be helpful in connecting parents and giving all a venue through which to express concerns, ask questions, and get answers. Anyone who isn't a member, and wants to join, should email Jodi Bailey at baileyj@alfred.edu.

Parent Handbook: We updated the *AU Parent Handbook* and have posted the PDF version on the Parents Web Page. Printed copies were handed out at new student check-in and at Parents Orientation. Copies are also available at the Information Desk this weekend.

New Business

Update on University Bandwidth Issues: Melody reported that the Director of ITS, Gary Roberts, wasn't able to attend the meeting today due to another commitment, but he provided information concerning the University's bandwidth issue. During the last decade the use of the Internet has exploded and the University has managed to respond. However, in the last three years, we have experienced exponential growth in the use of the Internet. We have begun strategically responding to this development with a plan to expand our infrastructure. This required that we establish relationships with new vendors. Our intention is to accomplish our strategic goals within the next few months with minimal cost. After a very long and protracted search, AU was able to partner with ION to increase Internet connectivity throughout New York State. Once the ION connection is established, it will triple AU's connection from 100 to 300 megabits-per-second (Mbps). Update: through conversations with AU's current Internet Service Provider, ITS has negotiated a significant increase in our Internet bandwidth through the end of the semester. This, along with the installation of a new server (just last night), increased our connection from 100 to 200 Mbps. The estimated time frame for the further upgrade to 300 Mbps is December '11 or January '12.

Q: What style of cable connection is used in the residence hall rooms?

A: Ethernet cables are used and these were given out to students on move-in day. Any student who still needs one can pick one up at ITS. The rooms also have wireless coverage but the speeds will vary depending on how many people are using it at the same time and the room's proximity to the wireless access radio.

Spring Family Weekend Dates: Spring Family Weekend will take place April 20-22, 2012. Senior Art Shows are May 5, 2012.

New Members & Prospective Members: We appreciate all the new people who attended today's meeting and welcome them to join the Board if they would like to. Please see Melody or Katie at the end of the meeting to let us know if you definitely want to join.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m. Our next meeting will take place Saturday, April 21, 2012, at 9:00 a.m.

/mhm
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