

FGLI Committee – Meeting Minutes December 4, 2019

Attendance:

Demetrius Colvin, Resource Center
Bob Coughlin, Financial Aid
Emma Farrell '22
Eugene Gato Nsengamungu '23
Michelle Jarvis-Lettman, Financial Aid
Jill Mattus, Student Affairs
Dean Mike Whaley, Student Affairs
Dean Jen Wood, Student Affairs

Dean Mike welcomed the group, everyone provided quick introductions, and made note of their favorite dish at their Thanksgiving table this year.

Dean Mike asked for the group to provide updates in their particular area.

Financial Aid

Bob noted that while despite the sub-committee not meeting (due to limited student interest in joining the sub-committees), a Financial Aid Strategy Working Group (moved forward by Amin Gonzalez, VP of Admission) has allowed several members of Cabinet and Financial Aid to discuss topics that have been a focus in the past for FGLI, but now are resulting in productive conversations that appear to be gaining traction.

Topics have included:

- Student Health Insurance (identified as highest priority)

By not offering to cover the cost of health insurance for low-income domestic students, the question of discussion is whether the University is truly meeting the full need of financial aid recipients.

- Start-up costs for high-need students

FA polled peer institutions to gather information about the identified needs (ex: for sheets, towels, etc.) and coverage offered. Some institutions offer coverage, others do not. This year, the University saw a greater number of international students than before experiencing start-up needs. Some of this could be attributed to increasing costs for various international fees (ie. SEVIS, VISA fees, etc), resulting in less money available from these students for start-up costs at Wes. FA will begin to examine the start-up costs/needs for domestic students as well, as they believe these overall needs will be a growing trend for the University.

- Cost of living adjustment for students from high cost areas
- Services over breaks (primarily dining)

FA ran numbers for the areas discussed and will be sharing with Amin, so that he can present recommendations to President Roth.

Dean Mike noted that having key people at the table to discuss these topics has been a great benefit. (Key representation from Student Affairs, Financial Aid, Finance, Admission, Equity and Inclusion and Chief of Staff)

Dean Mike also noted that in regards to the services over breaks:

- Chris Olt from Finance is researching the funding for a dining pilot program over Spring Break, potentially at Summerfields; the program will enable the University to gather information and assist in moving forward with a plan
- The Dining Committee is working to potentially re-structure a meal plan that offers a meal swipe for every meal offered, and in turn, the students will avoid running out of meals by the end of each semester and address their food insecurity.
- On a different, but related track, the Committee will be looking at the possibility of keeping dining halls open over breaks during the 2020-21 academic year.

Michelle noted that it might be helpful to look at the language used to describe meal plans and possibly rethink to clarify their descriptions.

Conversation continued around the timing of the Spring Break pilot program, the ideal number of students being present during Spring Break and the announcement of the program slated for early next semester.

Other Updates

Dean Mike noted that there was limited interest in joining FGLI sub-committees, since the invitation was sent in October. There were approximately 1-2 students interested in joining each committee. Dean Mike suggested that early next semester, we look at the idea of sub-committees and see how students feel about them. A possible lunch meeting to engage discussion was brought up as an option.

Demetrius noted that the Resource Center is trying to think through the dynamics of fall semester programming for FGLI students and where it best to position certain meetings and events to optimize turn-outs.

Michelle mentioned that Financial Aid works to develop strategic messaging by identifying key deadlines and dates beyond the Financial Aid office, so their communication is collaborative and strategic.

Eugene mentioned more follow-up might be helpful, when those that sign up for meetings or events receive confirmation.

Emma mentioned that as the semester progresses, and she prioritizes her involvement, she is more likely to make time for an event that a friend recommends, rather than from repeated e-mail blasts.

Demetrius noted that being collaborative is a priority and believes it will support the bringing of the University's community together.

Bob and Michelle noted that the Financial Aid Office held its first Open House for students in October. Approximately two dozen students attended. They will continue to look at fine-tuning the timing to be a better fit for the community.

Dean Mike also noted a few additional items in the works as we look ahead to the next semester:

- Dean Laura Patey is researching with the Class Deans and the Gordon Career Center to look at an option to offer test preparation courses as a ¼ credit class (potentially covered by Financial Aid).
- There is a thought to have Sharon Castonguay come to an upcoming FGLI meeting to speak to students about internships and what they should be thinking about.
- After FA has had a chance to discuss with other key constituents, FGLI can continue conversation around the concerns related to printing costs for. Senior thesis printing.. The costs often exceed the \$25 printing coverage initially provided by FA for eligible candidates. Demetrius also noted that particularly with Art majors, supplies can be particularly costly.

Jen Wood mentioned that during a recent visit to Conn College, the idea of an Emergency Loan was introduced. With a loan, the student borrows a certain amount and then pays back to the University, interest-free, but the funds replenish over time.

Dean Mike noted that particular option could be explored, but that currently the University offers and utilizes Emergency Funds. The funds are requested on a need-based basis and is beyond the student's Financial Aid package; eligibility is determined based on their need status.

Dean Mike thanked all for coming and that we would look forward to meeting early next semester, possibly for a lunch meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Jill Mattus
Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs