

Student Affairs & Campus Life Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

Date September 18, 2018

Present: Cedric Rucker, Juliette Landphair, Jason James, Maysoon Al-Sayed Ahmad, Patricia Orozco, Ping Yin, Jason Robins

Next meeting: October 23, 9 a.m.

I. Introductions

Dean Cedric Rucker – Dean of Students

Juliette Landphair – Vice President of Student Affairs

Jason James – Department of Sociology & Anthropology

Maysoon Al-Sayed Ahmad – Department of Modern Languages & Literatures

Patricia Orozco – Department of Modern Languages & Literatures

Ping Yin – Department of Geography

Jason Robinson – Department of Art & Art History

II. Chair Report

a. Committee goals

The purpose of the committee is to support the students holistically and bring the faculty perspective on the non-academic issues that affect students' success. Possible topics discussed with Vice President Landphair and Dean Rucker over the summer include:

- Role of athletics at UMW
- Substance abuse intervention
- Student conduct and how faculty deal with it
- **Supporting underrepresented students, including students of color, first-generation, and veterans**
- Ways to communicate with and train faculty on responding to students with mental health and other personal issues

b. Combining undergraduate and graduate commencement ceremonies

The committee has been asked to provide input on combining undergraduate and graduate students' commencement. One of the main issues raised has been that resources could be saved by combining the two ceremonies. Dean Rucker also pointed out that the number of graduate students (which formerly justified a separate ceremony) is smaller than it was some years ago, and that graduate students have expressed an interest in being part of the large ceremony on Ball Circle. There is some concern about how much additional time this would add to the existing ceremony. The number of graduate students in 2018 was 98; it would be good to know whether this is expected to increase to any significant degree.

One way of offering additional recognition to graduate students if they were included in the large ceremony would be for the individual colleges to have a hooding ceremony at a separate time, such as on Friday evening.

This opened up a conversation about how we conduct commencement as a whole. Although UMW is not a large university in comparison to many, would it make sense to also move toward having smaller ceremonies at the program or department level in addition to main ceremony? Some departments and programs already hold receptions or other events on Friday evening. It would be worthwhile to ask students how they would receive this, and whether they would prefer to symbolically receive their diploma from their department chair or the president. If we moved to students receiving their diplomas and handshake at the department level, the

larger ceremony could be shorter but include a recognition of different categories of graduates by asking them to stand.

One example of an institution of roughly comparable size to UMW is The College of William and Mary (approximately 6,000 undergraduates), which holds individual ceremonies at the department level. The committee will examine additional examples of smaller institutions comparable to UMW.

Discussion will be continued via email and in the next meeting. The committee can develop a more detailed report if requested by the UFC.

c. **Regalia guidelines — initial discussion**

The committee has also been asked to discuss guidelines for regalia and what the students can wear at the commencement and including augmentations such as those that reflect their ethnic heritage, first generation student, or other aspects of their education and experience at UMW. Currently there is no formal policy on regalia, although the Commencement Committee did approve the decoration of mortar boards in 2015. Currently decisions on the appropriateness of these decorations as well as other requests are made on a case by case basis by Dean Rucker. The university's Statement of Community Values can provide some guidance in this regard, but since commencement is ultimately an academic affair, it would be useful for faculty to be involved in these determinations and in providing more specific guidelines. It is worth keeping in mind that while allowing students to add stoles, badges, or other augmentations beyond the current decoration of the mortar board would likely be very positive for many, we should be cognizant of what this move and the corresponding guidelines might open up in terms of what would be considered "heritage" or forms of student involvement. Although other Virginia institutions do not seem to have detailed protocols for regalia, at least one (VCU) allows cords according to honors status as well as stoles or badges associated with recognized student organizations. In that case the final determination is still left to the Dean of Students, as it is at UMW. Since commencement is an academic occasion, would it make sense to create a faculty committee or assign the job of determining the appropriateness of student requests to an existing faculty committee, especially if we develop an official set of guidelines?

Discussion will be continued via email and in the next meeting. The committee can develop a more detailed report if requested by the UFC.

III. Next meeting

- a. Vice President Landphair will invite the Interim Director of Athletics to the committee meeting to discuss the current and future state of athletics at UMW.