

Student Affairs & Campus Life Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

Date November 13, 2018

Present: Juliette Landphair, Jason James, Patricia Orozco, Ping Yin, Jason Robins, Melissa Jones, Rita Thompson

Next meeting: TBA

I. Introductions

Juliette Landphair – Vice President of Student Affairs

Jason James – Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Committee Chair

Patricia Orozco – Department of Modern Languages & Literatures

Ping Yin – Department of Geography

Jason Robinson – Department of Art & Art History

Melissa Jones – Assistant Dean of Student Involvement

Rita Thompson – Director, Rappahannock Scholars Program and Co-Chair, UMW First-In-Family Student Success Program

II. Discussion of Efforts to Support Underrepresented Students

Rita Thompson and Melissa Jones joined Vice President Landphair in outlining the current situation at UMW with regard to the growing number underrepresented students — particularly first-in-family and minority students.

a. Context

- Vice President Landphair highlighted the long-term changes in UMW's student population. Having gone from a women's college to a co-ed institution, the university is now becoming much more diverse in other ways. This change is related to both changing demographics as well as strategic goals of the university. UMW wants to reflect the demographics of the Commonwealth, and we are aware that the student population of the future will be more diverse.

b. Retention

- Vice President Landphair underscored that President Paino has set a goal of improving retention overall, which is obviously important with respect to students completing their degrees, as well as for tuition revenue and UMW's reputation. Currently our overall retention rate has declined somewhat, but the rate for African-American and Latin-x students has improved. Students in this category generally have a lower retention rate than the overall average, however.

c. First-Generation Students - Numbers

- Rita Thompson explained the UMW currently has about 400 students who fall under the category of first-in-family defined as students whose parents or guardians did not graduate from a four-year institution.

d. First-Generation Students' Needs and Sense of Belonging

- Rita Thompson explained that first in family students face various challenges in succeeding in college. They may feel lonely and that they do not really belong here. They may not have family

members or other community at home who attended college and can understand their situation. They may ask themselves why they are attending college at all. They are more likely to interpret what they see as negative feedback such as a bad grade as evidence that they do not belong here. They do not always see themselves as having the same rights as others. They are unsure about how to approach professors and where to go for assistance with academic or family issues.

- At the same time, not all first-in-family students are the same. There are differences in class background and language spoken at home. Some may be international students.
- Melissa Jones further explained that these students can lack the cultural fluency that some of their peers possess. There is a “hidden curriculum” that others take for granted but they may not possess.
- In addition to that, they may be in a position of having to educate their families about what they are doing at UMW. Parents and guardians who have not been to college (and in some cases did not graduate from high school) may need additional information about many things, including the fact that their communication with administrators and professors about their child’s situation is different from their communication with teachers in K-12, or that, in the case of students with a full scholarship, the student will still need funds for everyday items like toiletries.

e. First-Generation Students’ Academic Preparedness and Performance

- In response to a question about the academic performance of these students, Rita Thompson explained that nationally students in this group have a lower retention rate. If they do not find their niche, they are more likely to give up and go home. In the case of the Rappahannock Scholars, although they are strong students and were at the top of their class in high school, they can be a grade level lower in some areas compared to their peers. During the first year here, they are catching up. They can have a difficult time with this after the experience of having been at the top of their class in high school. They have to be convinced that they may have to take a different path than others to get to where they want to go.
- Jason Robinson pointed out that UMW is more rigorous and challenging than some students realize. There can be a mismatch between what we expect and the abilities of some students who are admitted. Patricia Orozco also asked in relation to this whether and how the difference between high school and college is communicated in high schools. Melissa Jones pointed out that in addition to recruiting such students we do need to be sure we can resource them and convince them to use those resources. Rita Thompson also suggested that there is a long-term effort toward aligning high schools in Virginia and collaborating with high school counselors such that students know more what to expect. There has been some progress in working with some high schools from which many UMW students come, including West Springfield and Lake Braddock.
- This prompted discussion about the more general issue of UMW being seen as academically challenging, especially based on the language requirement, which seems to discourage some students from applying.
- Melissa Jones shared information regarding these students’ participation in on-campus activities and use of resources. Based on data from focus groups, they found that about 70 percent of students access some form of campus recreation, but the proportion for underrepresented students is lower. They do not see spaces on campus, including the Talley Center, as safe for

them, partly based on whether they see them as being staffed by people like them or who can relate to them.

- This makes it necessary to ask what makes other places on campus not feel safe, and how we can make them more so? One thing that factors in for black students is that we do not have Greek life, and at other universities there are traditionally black fraternities and sororities that serve a really important function and can involve a life-long commitment. The James Farmer Multicultural Center is embraced as a safe place by many of these students, but the campus as a whole is not yet as safe for them as it could be. More can be done to communicate to faculty about these students' circumstances and how they can assist them and make them feel welcome.
- Vice President Landphair suggested that in the end, everyone at the university can play a role in spreading awareness and knowledge. This includes faculty being aware of ways in which they might not always contribute to these students' sense of being in a safe place, even if those faculty see themselves as very inclusive and aware. Melissa Jones also suggested that many faculty would be receptive to hearing from these students' stories, but the students are not comfortable sharing them.

f. Programs and Goals

- Rita Thompson explained that the first orientation event for these students is held in August. Veterans and transfer students are also included. The goal is to help them build a network of people and services and to help them feel that they are part of a community, and communicate that being at UMW can be a wonderful experience, that it is a safe place for them, that help and information are available to them. It is important for them to know where they can go for help, whom they can ask.
- The university is also developing a publication directed specifically toward these students to help them identify resources etc.
- Rita's office has also initiated an identity campaign that incorporates things such as stickers, a banner, and special admissions events to convey the message that UMW embraces first-in-family students. They have attempted to start a club for these students, but with this and other efforts there may be hesitation among these students to announce their status as first-in-family. We want to acknowledge who they are and their particular needs, but not separate them from other students; to help them adjust but also see their uniqueness as important.
- The university, especially Tim O'Donnell, is working to help the families of these students during orientation, to answer their questions and help them be better prepared for what is coming as well as provide information with the understanding that they may not know what to ask in some cases. Admissions and orientation have evolved and are continuing to do so, including looking at holding sessions in Spanish.

III. Chair Report and Approval of Minutes

a. Minutes

- Minutes from the committee's first two meetings were approved unanimously.

b. Regalia Guidelines Update

- Jason James reported that he has been in communication with Jackie Gallagher and Anand Rao, Chair and Chair-elect of the UFC respectively, regarding the process of deciding which body should develop and apply guidelines for regalia. All three agreed that this committee is not the most appropriate without a change in its charge. The UFC will take up this question at its next meeting.

IV. Next Meeting

- a.** Committee members agreed that it would be helpful to have a representative from the Talley Center come to the next meeting to share information about suicidal ideation among students.