

University Budget Advisory Committee

Minutes – 4/8/2021 meeting

Voting members present: Nabil Al-Tikriti (Chair, At-large)
Stephen Davies (Secretary, At-large)
Laura Bylenok (At-large)
Kyle Schultz (COE)
Suzanne Sumner (At-large)
Liane Houghtalin (CAS)
Chris Garcia (COB)

Non-voting members present: Patrick Catullo (Athletic Director)
Michelle Pickham (Staff Advisory Council President)

Guests: Kimberley Buster-Williams, Vice President Enrollment Management
Melissa Yakabouski, Director of Undergraduate Admissions

1. The meeting was devoted to a presentation from Kimberley Buster-Williams, Vice President for Enrollment Management, and Melissa Yakabouski, Director of Undergraduate Admissions. Their remarks were mostly related to how Covid has impacted their areas, although they did reference the state of affairs before the pandemic hit:
 - “Mind Power” had been selected for UMW’s rebranding effort.
 - Huron consultants had drafted a 5-year Student Success Plan in consultation with various UMW stakeholders.
 - The coming (and already present) “demographic cliff” was looming large.
2. When the quarantine began, Ms. Buster-Williams’s division made a series of proposals to address what should happen in real time, which included a plethora of strategies. These included, among others, targeting students who have temporarily stopped making progress on their degrees, implementing two-way texting through Mongoose, and inaugurating a new presidential leadership program (PELP). In January they calculated enrollment projections – including high, medium, and low scenarios – knowing that this year’s class will be a smaller class no matter what we do.
3. Nationally, community college applications are trending down, although Germanna, one of our most important feeders, seems to be an anomaly. NVCC has a strong partnership with George Mason, which makes it difficult for us to get too many transfer students from there.
4. FAFSA completion rates are sharply down in many areas of Virginia, which is an ominous sign. One big reason for this is degraded high school counseling during the pandemic. So much of each student’s college decision comes down to what happens “on the ground” in their high school. Two huge factors are word of mouth from other students, and suggestions from guidance counselors, both of which have been greatly diminished this year.
5. In general, there is still so much uncertainty about what’s going to happen this fall, that potential students are reluctant to commit. They especially want to know what on-campus living is going to look like in the coming year. Too, we continue to see more “price sensitivity” on the part of prospective students, which forces us into a balancing act in which we try and meet financial needs and still get good students. These factors put great strain on an admissions division striving to put together an incoming freshman class. We’ll know much more about the final

numbers for the upcoming year in a few weeks (there is typically a lot of movement right before May 1st).

6. Although Covid's impact on enrollment has been dire, there are some bright spots. Last summer, Ms. Buster-Williams's staff estimated as much as a 30% decline in applications, due both to the pandemic directly and also to having fewer outreach events than normal. Happily, it's only a 15% decline at the moment. Another piece of unexpected good news is that our out-of-state applications (and admissions) are up, possibly because interviews and "visits" were all online, which made participation much less onerous for potential out-of-state students.
7. Another bit of good news relates to our incoming student profile: this is actually not degrading as we thought it would. Average high school GPA, SAT scores, and so forth all remain strong. The number of students choosing to report SAT scores, though, is sharply down (only 26% reporting so far, instead of the usual >50%). This could be due simply to fewer students taking the proctored exam during the pandemic. Ms. Yakabouski noted that many of our competitor institutions are introducing "test-optional" application policies, which greatly increases their applicant pool.
8. One technology point of note regards the "Capture" recruiting tool UMW recently purchased. Until recently, we have not been able to connect the traffic on our website with a particular prospective student. "Capture" now allows us to do this: if a visitor fills out a form on the website, or reaches the site by clicking on an enhanced URL from a recruiting email, we can get a record of their virtual visit including which pages they visited. This turns our website from a passive to an active tool, and Ms. Yakabouski was optimistic that this will help us zone in on and land a body of students we've been heretofore been missing.
9. UMW regularly denies some Honors Program applications, which are (presumably) from high-achieving students who then decline UMW's acceptance offer altogether. During a period in which many universities are struggling to meet enrollment numbers (due to the "demographic cliff," the pandemic, and other factors) it may be wise to rethink this. Ms. Yakabouski said that the consensus best practice for Honors programs is to aim for about 10% of enrolling class. UMW's Honors Program was much larger than that last year, although in 2021 this is now lagging as well as applications in general.
10. Finally, the committee brainstormed which impactful areas within Enrollment and Admissions which could benefit from increased funding. Ms. Buster-Williams said that her general strategy would be to advocate for areas that directly generate enrollment – *e.g.*, Athletics, the Honors Program, Music, Theatre, and others. Regarding Athletics, Mr. Catullo confirmed that UMW could indeed probably add another hundred student-athletes, if we had trainers and other resources to support them. The committee also asked what factors generally turn potential students away from choosing UMW. Unfortunately (or fortunately?) Ms. Buster-Williams stated that truly, no consistent huge factors really come to mind. The data we've obtained from students who decline our offers generally tells us that applicants view UMW very positively: oftentimes we're simply the student's second choice.