

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
FACULTY COUNCIL ON STUDENT AFFAIRS**

The Faculty Council on Student Affairs met at 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, **November 8, 2001**, in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Lee Nelson presided.

Approval of minutes

The minutes of May 1, 2001 and October 11, 2001 were approved as written.

Presentation of survey data on student experiences of campus life: Cathy Beyer and Nana Lowell. Office of Educational Assessment.

Beyer said that, beginning in 1999, some 300 students (70% incoming freshmen, 30% incoming transfer student from community colleges) began participating in a multi-layered assessment of student experiences at the University of Washington. This project is called the UW Study of Undergraduate Learning (UW Soul).

Approximately half of the students participate in yearly interviews, focus groups and Web-based surveys, respond to open-ended E-mail questions, submit examples of their class work, and write reflective essays. The other half answer E-mail questions and respond to all of the surveys. All participants are remunerated.

Beyer said that, with respect to campus climate (she quoted Lee Nelson's statement made on behalf of FCSA: "Our concern is campus climate and what we are doing to make and keep it positive, growthful, and supportive."), four aspects of campus climate stood out in findings from the UW Soul: 1) a climate that fosters independence; 2) a climate that fosters community; 3) a climate that fosters academic competence and can inspire academic passion; and 4) a climate that fosters appreciation for diversity.

As for the first aspect, Beyer said students "are becoming more independent." This process – which includes their classes – is the "biggest part of their life on campus." Learning to "think on their own" is absolutely vital to incoming students at the University; developing this skill instills into them a "sense of responsibility." "Students are proud of their independence," Beyer said, and that includes transfer students, who also must adapt and emerge and "step forward" at the UW, even if they are juniors upon arrival. (The campus climate is as new to them as it is to incoming freshmen.) Beyer quoted one student who wrote, "I have learned to question what I hear and understand how I came to believe what I do," and another who wrote, "I am living on my own and my decisions are solely based on my own thoughts and actions."

As for the second aspect, that of community, Beyer said, "In focus groups, students were asked what most surprised them in their first year at the University, and their answer was itself surprising: the University was 'smaller' than they had thought it would be." That "smaller community" was formed through their dormitory life and their classes and social contacts. Beyer said that for freshmen the University is "doing a good job of fostering a sense of community." Sometimes this "community" dissipates in the sophomore year and shifts when students enter their majors and begin to live off-campus. Beyer said transfer students often have a difficult time finding a "communal life" at the University, especially older transfer students.

One particularly difficult adjustment for many incoming students is that, for the first time in their academic careers, they do not "stand out" from their fellow students. They are surrounded by students as gifted as, or more gifted than, they themselves are. (And gifted peers intimidate them more than gifted faculty do.) This exacerbates their apprehension that their new environment is not congenial to them and makes it hard for them to ask questions in, and outside, the classroom.

Many students are surprised at how difficult attaining academic competence can be at the university level. Tellingly, most students aver that the classes they most enjoy are the ones that are most difficult. They want to be challenged, and, in many of their large introductory classes, this challenge is missing. They perform better academically when they are challenged, and prefer classes in which their writing skills must be developed. That they perform best when the faculty member teaching the class is doing so with some degree of passion, and not simply going through the motions, cannot be overstated. Beyer said, "The academic climate here is good overall."

With respect to diversity at the UW, Beyer said that most students find this to be the most diverse environment in which they have been. This being said, it must be noted that a great many students have a different notion of what diversity means than do faculty. The finest distinctions and slightest differences, to many students from homogeneous communities, can constitute "diversity." For them the word may have nothing to do with ethnic distinctions. Students who have different behavioral patterns or who come from different social classes see one another as representing "diversity." Beyer said, "We're integrating diversity into the social sciences and the humanities; upwards of 75 courses (in the departments of English and Sociology especially) have diversity issues as part of their content."

Beyer said that students see "voluntary segregation" occurring throughout the campus. Different ethnic groups have different "geographical sections" of the campus to which they gravitate. "Questions of diversity are more important to students in their first two years than they are to upper division students," Beyer stressed.

In conclusion, Beyer said, "We're doing a lot to create a campus climate that is 'growthful,' positive, and supportive, at least during the freshman year."

Nelson said the comments from students on "campus climate" at the UW make her think about "how much individual faculty contribute to students' growth and a positive campus experience" for those students who take up the challenge offered by the University." Beyer said faculty are "often surprised at students' positive responses to their work." She said, "We must remember; students come here with very complex goals with respect to learning." Nelson said this is the only university of which she has been a part that does not offer "social skills training and instruction." Beyer said students "do get some of that, but it is not taught directly."

Karmy-Jones said, "We forget the strain of forcing students to be generalists. They get more focused as they go along. If a student knows what his focus will be, he seeks out a specific community on campus related to his major." Karmy-Jones contrasted the undergraduate system in the United States to that of Europe and Scandinavia, in which students at a young age already are receiving intensive training in focused areas of study, and by the time they graduate from the lycée or the gymnasium, and commence their university life, are more than acquainted with the discipline that will be their career. "Students [in the United States] don't come prepared," he said. "And there is little or no feedback given to the high schools from which they come."

Lowell distributed a "Campus Climate Survey 1999: Methodology and Preliminary Findings: December 1999," and a follow-up of the same survey conducted in March, 2001 at the request of President McCormick. She also distributed a chart showing "General UW Experiences (Current Students)." Lowell said, "Experiences here [at the UW] are not that different between minority and majority students."

Nelson said, "Compared to other universities, the UW is not that diverse a community." (This has been noted in several other faculty councils, particularly in the Special Committee on Minority Faculty

Affairs.) It was noted that, in the “General UW Experiences” chart, the only classifications are “Caucasian” and “Minority,” whereas the breakdown differs greatly from minority group to minority group.

Beyer said, “How people look at you is a huge part of your sense of the campus climate.” And Lowell added, “This is especially difficult for people with disabilities. We want to reach out to all campus constituencies.”

Karmy-Jones said the creation of a successful campus climate must be the work of faculty and students equally. “Faculty can’t effect all this change; the student union [the ASUW] needs to get involved as well.” Nelson said faculty “can be pivotal in helping students adapt” to the campus climate.

Kravas said Beyer and Lowell need to make suggestions to faculty based on the data and findings of their surveys. He said faculty need to know what the “best practices” are by means of which they can implement the ideas most useful to creating a positive campus climate for students and faculty alike.

Lowell said that the Office of Educational Assessment “needs input in what faculty and staff need from us.” She said she would welcome any ideas on reaching faculty and staff that the council might put forward.

Statements in the surveys that revealed significant differences in response included: “Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of college education.” The “Minority” response of 5.4 was much more positive than the “Caucasian” response of 4.9.

“Contact with individuals who are different from me (e.g., race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation) are an essential part of my college education.” The “Minority” response of 5.1 was, again, much more positive than the “Caucasian” response of 4.6.

“I have been exposed to racial / ethnic conflict on campus.” The “Minority” response of 3.1 was significantly higher than the “Caucasian” response of 2.5.

“I have been exposed to a racist atmosphere in the classroom.” The “Minority” response of 2.2 was significantly higher than the “Caucasian” response of 1.5.

“I am more likely to discuss topics related to cultural diversity with friends.” The “Minority” response of 4.3 was considerably higher than the “Caucasian” response of 3.9.

Next meeting

The next FCSA meeting will take place in January 2002. Once the schedule for Winter Quarter is set, the council will be notified by E-mail.

Brian Taylor
Recorder

PRESENT: *Professors* Nelson (chair), Karmy-Jones, O’Neill and Nicholson;
Ex officio members Bennett, Clark and Kravas.
Guests Catherine Beyer, UW Soul, Office of Educational Assessment; Nana Lowell,
Director, Office of Educational Assessment.

ABSENT: *Professors* Lehman, Schwartz and Williams;
ex officio members Baker, Feetham, Godfrey and Hatlen.