University Council Committee on Campus and Community Life
Final Report
2011-2012

2011-2012 Specific Charges

1. Continue to review the PULSE survey and other information about the climate among students, staff and faculty; evaluate the findings of these surveys; and consider how this information could be used to improve the quality of life at Penn.

2. Continue conversations with dining services to discuss the adequacy of dining services and follow up on last year’s meeting to discuss the findings of the blue ribbon committee of stakeholders and the Residential Advisory Board put together by Doug Berger, Executive Director of the Business Services Division. Consider how the provision of food services fits into Penn’s mission.

3. Consider the implications of creating or expanding non-degree conferring programs for non-academic life.

4. Review and discuss the committee’s general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given highest priority for the committee’s work in AY 2012-2013.

The Committee met five times. The office of student life provided invaluable support in arranging meetings and meeting places. Fitting with the purpose of the committee, we were able to meet in the LGBT center, the ARCH, Houston Hall, and the VPUL offices.

Report per Charges

1) PULSE Survey - The committee met after attending the PULSE survey qualitative results presentation in January. To provide a brief background, the PULSE survey was a broad survey of undergraduates regarding their experiences at Penn. The original survey instrument found differences in responses based on race and ethnicity particularly around respect and community. The Provost’s office subsequently asked Judy Shea, PhD to explore the meaning of the quantitative differences using qualitative methods. Dr. Shea presented her findings from seven focus groups held with oversampling of student leaders and minority students.

On the issue of respect - While the purpose of the group was to understand the issues of disrespect found in the quantitative instrument, the focus group participants did not initially identify it as an issue or a problem. On further probing, participants from a minority background were able to identify instances of disrespect. These instances described an environment of insiders versus outsiders, a classroom perspective of either being overlooked or having the expectation of “speaking for the race”. The larger issue that was identified by all groups regardless of race, LGBT status, or leadership status was that there is difference in treatment of people based on socio-economic status (SES). It was strongly felt that SES highly determines students’ undergraduate experience outside the classroom. While people talk about race, SES in the issue. SES leads to both segregation and isolation in the Penn community and creates feelings of pressure or stigma in individuals. Specifically there is pressure on students from low SES to “keep up” with the “Penn way”. It was felt this carries over into the classroom especially around professor expectations of purchasing course materials and in course discussions. Students
recommended more events with more programmed and structured interactions. The participants also recommended more recruitment and retention of minority faculty.

On the issue of community, focus group participants reported that Penn fosters segmentation into small, target, or affinity groups. Students felt more connected to small groups than to the University as a whole. They did not feel community existed at the University level. The pigeon holing into small groups was especially felt among minority participants. Places that the University fosters community include the college houses and particularly the freshman house, extracurricular activities later in their academic careers, majors, shared backgrounds, and mutual friends. The students recommended improved mentoring, spreading the activity fair over time, improved roommate matching, more group and forced class[year] activities, interactions between upper and incoming classes, late night activities, and “improved off-hour eating options through non-union labor”.

In summary though, students felt Penn was an “ivy buffet” and a “complex mosaic” of “unexpected treasures”. Generally participants were happy and required probes to find negative issues. Essentially all said they would come to Penn again.

Our conclusions and recommendations-

a) It is difficult to know if the findings are doing great or doing terribly. The comparables are unknown. Can this be compared to the national survey on student engagement? Even if a national comparison said we were doing well, we should not rest when there is opportunity for doing better.

b) SES is an issue inside and outside the classroom.
   i) The committee concludes that SES probably needs more study to understand class differences. This may interact with other demographic variables.
   ii) The CCL committee believes there is communication to faculty that should be done right away about the classroom environment. Specifically, the focus group findings around pressures on students from lower SES backgrounds should be shared. In addition, the findings around African American students feeling the expectation of “speaking for the race” should be shared with faculty.

c) The focus group data should be used to inform the next iteration of the pulse survey.

d) There is some within Penn messaging about belonging at “Penn” or “Not Penn” that may be about non-Penn community members but that may carry into our Penn community around SES. An example of this would be neighborhoods we live in, security of places around Penn, or activities outside of Penn to participate in.

2) Dining Services – The committee met with Doug Berger and Pamela Lampitt. The recent renovations to McClelland Hall were discussed including the co-location of retail and all you care to eat environments. Plans for strategic renovations of Class of 1920 Commons were described focusing on creating a central gathering space and supporting the mission of the University. Hill dining renovation plans were also described. Bon Appétit was recognized and congratulated for being an excellent partner of the University which provides good service to the university community.

Current AY new meal plan designs were described as well as the philosophy of creating a broad menu of plans for different types of students. These range from high dining dollar low meal swipe plans to unlimited meal swipe plans (the EAT plan). There were some challenges this year over some students taking advantage of loopholes in certain plans.
Finally, the strategic role of providing dining services as part of the university mission was discussed. Specifically, there is a broad spectrum of roles of dining services at peer institutions. Some institutions see dining plans as a revenue center that can subsidize other institutional activities. Other institutions see providing environments where academic discourse can occur over meals as core to the institutional mission and subsidize the plans. In addition, it was felt that dining provides space for interactions and access that is not based on SES status (see PULSE survey above). Penn’s model is strongly consistent with the former (revenue center that can subsidize). While the Penn consumer price of meal plans is consistent with or less than other institutions, there is a “university services” or allocated cost charge to these revenues which reduces the funds available for dining plan product. While the fungible nature of money prevents direct assignment of these “allocated costs” to other expenses, the business model of the university may connect these subsidies to Penn day care, transit, and mail services.

The following suggestions were made by the committee regarding dining services:

a) Dining services should be provided as part of the mission of the university to create non-classroom space and time to develop intellectual discourse and that is not accessed based on SES status.

b) GAs and RAs in the college houses could become ambassadors for dining services and communicate about the variety of meal plans available to students.

c) Integrating faculty into dining services is a desirable way to support the academic mission of having dining. This includes supporting faculty meal plans as well as the Provost’s office continuing to support special dining service meals for specific classes. Advertising the extant Provost’s office support for these themed meals would be helpful.

d) In co-located retail and all you care to eat environments (McClelland and soon Commons and Hill), there needs to be better management of all you care to eat operations to match inventory availability for both choices. The committee also supports “meal equivalent” availability for retail purchases.

e) The issues of allocated costs are part of the University’s complex ecology. The committee strongly supports dining as a space for developing students’ intellectual and democratic skills. The committee also supports the subsidy of child care for low wage workers. De-linking these two important missions may be a solution.

f) See below regarding internal competition.

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3) Non Degree conferring programs – This issue was discussed at our last meeting of the year. Kathy Urban came from LPS to assist us in discussing the issue. It was clear that the issue is not easily defined in that there are credit granting non-degree programs including visiting students and Quaker consortium students, non-credit non-degree certificate programs, other teaching or training programs including conferences and specific department or office independent-activities, and commercial space and staff rental opportunities. This diversity of programming makes it difficult to define “non-degree conferring programs”.

The committee reached the following conclusions:

a) Non-degree offerings seem to be managed on an ad-hoc basis specific to the program, office, department, or division that is hosting it. If non-degree programs are to grow, there needs to be
institutional coordination to deal with any issues the university may face. The status quo allows programs to start without looking at the impact on the university environment.

b) Revenue (central administration or local office) is an attractive benefit of non-degree programs but may contrast to the degree granting mission of the university. These revenue generating activities can create demands for space, infrastructure, and support that is then taken away from Penn community members who are involved in the degree granting mission. Conference services is the most visible provider of non-credit non-degree programs but there are other autonomous programs that create competition for space, infrastructure, and support.

c) Support services should be available for enrolled non-degree students including crisis management, health services like CAPS, career services, and library resource privileges. The committee recognizes there is a cost associated with these but did not have the information or resources to understand if these costs are already paid through central subvention or would need to be paid in addition to current support.

d) See below regarding internal competition.

4) Internal competition issues addressed by the 2011-2012 charges – The committee found in discussing the charges that internal financial competition from Responsibility Center Management may have long term effects on intra-institution collaboration and cooperation and that internal economies and shared mission may be compromised. The University should think strategically about the effect of internal competition on the institution and the role of competition for revenues and avoidance of expenses within the institution. The committee felt this competition probably promoted intra-institutional exclusion rather than the desired internal efficiency of Responsibility Center Management. While creating good fiscal management, RCM may also create competition for external revenues which lowers marginal revenues. It may also create monopoly power with intra-institution expenses which drives up these costs. Stewardship and revenue generation in RCM may tax mission based activities. This was particularly seen with the dining services discussion and the non-degree activities. It also probably contributed to the exclusion of bicycle commuters from benefits (see additional issues below). The committee felt this issue sat behind many of its charges but also felt that this issue was beyond the scope of this committee.

5) Identifying two or three charges for AY 2012-2013

a) The committee should consider a reduced number of charges but explore them more deeply
b) The committee should consider the proposal to make the campus a smoke free environment.

c) The committee would like to understand the prevalence, the offices responsible to oversee, the definitions of, and the University policies on bullying, including cyber bullying, throughout the university community.
The anti-hazing policy of the University focuses on fraternities and sororities and is managed through the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs and the Office of Student Conduct. There are numerous anti-hazing efforts on campus that are primarily if not exclusively directed at OFSA registered Greek fraternities and sororities. Perceived hazing, however, seems to be a broader issue that includes non-OFSA recognized social and professional fraternities, secret societies, registered student groups, and the Undergraduate Assembly. It was felt that the difference between perceived hazing and hazing is not apparent except in hindsight and that there are different perceptions of the group activities based on being internal or external to the group. The committee heard that the activities perceived as hazing actually are “bonding”, “a sense of legitimacy”, “rites of passage”, “initiation rituals”, and “collective transgression”. In these contexts the spirit of the rituals and the voluntariness of participants in the rituals was emphasized.

The committee made the following suggestions:

   i) Perceived hazing compromises inclusion of potential new diverse members to our community.
   ii) The hazing policy should focus on the University community broadly. The specific mention in the Penn Book Antihazing Regulations reference to including “fraternities and sororities” in the University community seems to direct the policy at them and away from other student groups where hazing may be occurring. The reference should be to the whole community. In addition, section C is explicit to fraternities and sororities and the policy should apply more broadly.
   iii) The Antihazing Regulation Section B is too specific in naming what hazing is and should be less so. It may give the appearance than non-listed activities are not hazing.
   iv) Faculty and College Houses staff should have training on looking for and talking about hazing.
   v) There is value to collective transgression and the University should not attempt to micro-manage group rituals.

2) Bicycles on Campus – A committee member brought to the committee an additional issue of bicycle commuter benefits. The committee accepted the issue of bicycles on campus onto its agenda. The committee recognized the positive climate environment and physical health impact that bicycling to, on, and around campus has. The committee discussed two issues in particular around bicycles. The availability of the federally allowed bicycle commuter benefit and the campus environment of bicycles and pedestrians mixing.

Section 132 (f) of the IRS code allows for qualified reimbursement of qualified bicycle commuter expenses which includes expenses of: the purchase of a bicycle and bicycle improvements, repair, and storage. (IRS publication 15-B). For IRS purposes, these expenses are equated to the provision of transit passes and qualified parking. While the University offers (income tax-free) fringe benefits for (petroleum based) transit and parking, it does not support employees who choose to bicycle to work with the same allowed fringe benefits.

The committee then discussed the physical environment on campus with increasing numbers of bicycles. The growing number of bicycles on campus create a potentially dangerous environment when pedestrians and bicycles mix. The committee was grateful for the significant increase in bicycle lanes and marking/signage of bicycle lanes on campus.
The committee made the following recommendations:

a) For fairness and environmental sustainability, the University should support bicycle commuters with the IRS allowable fringe benefit for bicycle commuting.

b) Bicycle bans on pedestrian walkways should be expanded beyond Locust Walk during limited hours to all pedestrian walkways, including Hamilton Walk, during all hours.

c) Maintenance of bicycle bans on pedestrian walkways should be better managed either positively through community communication or alternatively through more enforcement.

d) Campus design for campus bicycle based transportation should continue to be developed so community members traveling across the campus can travel more efficiently. This includes:
   i) Continuous improvement of street based bicycle paths
   ii) Creation of bike-designated paths (Sansom St, Curie Blvd)
   iii) FRES developing “bike-campus maps” to emphasize how a biker can get around campus.
   iv) The development of more advanced bicycle corrals including support for electric bikes and facilities (changing/shower) for people who bike before, during, or after work.

Committee Members
CHAIR: Kent Bream; Liaison: Karu Kozuma; Staff: Laura Harcourt; Faculty: Andrea Doyle, Kathleen Hall, Tsitsi Jaji, Angela Mills, Ben Nathans, Jason Schnittker; Graduate/professional students: Maria Murray; Undergraduate Students: Nikita Anand, Tiffany Zhu; PPSA: Chris Pastore, Karima Williams; WPPSA: Loretta Hauber, Joyce Jones