

# Report of the Senate Committee on Students and Educational Policy (SCSEP)

## General Committee Charge

The Committee oversees and advises the Executive Committee on matters relating to the University's policies and procedures on the admission and instruction of students, including academic integrity, admissions policies and administration, evaluation of teaching, examinations and grading, academic experiences, educational opportunities (such as study abroad), student records, disciplinary systems, and the campus environment. In general, the Committee deals with the matters covered in section IV of the University's *Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators*.

## 2014-2015 Specific Charges

1. Discuss Penn's efforts to support student mental health, consulting with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) representatives and the Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare.

2. Review status of proposed changes to the Penn Charter on rules regarding sanctions for un-reportable student offenses.

3. Discuss with representatives from Penn Abroad and International Internship Program how Penn is supporting students who want to participate in summer study abroad programs.

4. Continue discussions with Eric Furda, dean of admissions, about strategies likely to yield applications from students from underrepresented groups.

5. Review and discuss this Committee's general charge, as provided in the Senate Rules, and identify what you believe to be the most pressing issues facing the Faculty, students and educational programs over the next few years. In light of your discussions, recommend to the Senate Executive Committee two or three high-priority charges for the Committee on Students and Educational Policy to undertake in academic year 2015-2016. In explaining these charges, outline any appropriate actions you suppose the Senate might conceivably take after its review.

## Accomplishments

1. Discuss Penn's efforts to support student mental health, consulting with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) representatives and the Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare.

The Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare, led by Rebecca Bushnell, professor of English, and Anthony Rostain, professor of psychiatry and pediatrics issued its final report in February, 2015. Report of the Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare (*Almanac Supplement*, February 17, 2015).

SCSEP was pleased to receive the Task Force Report and that the University is providing additional resources to CAPS. The committee is also pleased to learn that CAPS offers training for department chairs and faculty leaders. The committee suggested this training be open to all interested faculty, but it is not known whether the resources necessary to accomplish this were available.

The Committee also discussed whether future task forces would be more effective if they covered a broader scope of related issues, since mental health issues are also connected to alcohol abuse and sexual assault. To some members, it seemed inefficient to have separate task forces addressing these interconnected issues.

There are still many outstanding challenges including the ones discussed in the Task Force report. Some of these challenges include:

- Communicating the importance of mental health and wellbeing to student success to the University Community;
- Disseminating information about available resources and supports for student mental health and wellness;
- Educating and training faculty, staff, students, parents, and families about fostering mental health and responding to students who need help;
- Optimizing the resources devoted to CAPS to meet the needs of students.

In view of the Task Force findings as well as the need to improve the psychological health and welfare of all members of the University com-

munity, the Committee proposes the creation of the Faculty Mental Health and Welfare Pilot Program: Faculty Wellness Ambassador Initiative. This program aims to improve:

- Communication of the importance of student mental health and wellbeing,
- Dissemination of information on the available resources,
- Education and training of faculty and staff. In short, this Wellness Ambassador Program consists of training selected faculty members in each of Penn's academic departments (and/or Schools) on issues related to student's mental health and wellbeing.

Selected faculty (and possibly staff) will receive training from the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff in order to become aware of the main issues related to student's psychological wellbeing and the main resources available at Penn. It is important to note that the selected faculty ambassador is neither a mental health counselor nor a substitute for one. Rather, the Wellness Ambassador will serve as a timely resource for faculty members seeking advice on mental health issues as well as available resources and programs available at Penn. The faculty ambassador is also expected to increase awareness in their respective departments and schools of the challenges confronting students that can affect their psychological health and wellbeing. The Committee believes that this would be an efficient model for training faculty. The department chair would nominate a candidate, who would then undertake training and educate other faculty members on these issues. This position would rotate over time (2 to 3 years) so many faculty members would end up receiving the training.

2. Review status of proposed changes to the Penn Charter on rules regarding sanctions for un-reportable student offenses & (ii) summer study abroad programs.

In view of the difficulty getting faculty members to report student conduct issues, the rules on reported offenses have recently been changed. Under the new rule, if a student is found responsible of a student conduct violation at a level that only requires a letter of reprimand, there is not a permanent record kept on file. Faculty members need to be made aware of this student conduct rule change.

The Committee believes that the initial issue regarding changes to the Penn Charter on rules regarding sanctions for un-reportable student offenses is resolved. The main change is that if a student is found responsible of a student conduct violation at a level that only requires a letter of reprimand a permanent record is not kept on file, but the Office of Student Conduct may keep a record of the transgression. This measure should encourage more faculty members to report minor violations. However, it is not clear that faculty members across the University are aware of this student conduct change. SCSEP strongly encourages the Julie Nettleton, director of the Office of Student Conduct, to proactively reach out to faculty members across the University to make them aware of this procedural change. SCSEP also encourages the Office of Student Conduct to reach out to departments and schools across the University to educate them on the resources available and procedures concerning student academic integrity, old and new.

## 3. Study Abroad

SCSEP remains concerned about the summer study abroad program, particularly with regards to financial aid available to students. It is clear that there are some financial strains associated with the program and SCSEP will work closely with representatives of Penn Global and Student Financial Services in the coming academic year to learn more about the main issues affecting the program.

## 4. Diversity

The University of Pennsylvania started an action plan for faculty diversity and excellence to encourage the recruitment and benefit the retention of minority faculty, and SCSEP wanted to learn about resources for

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underrepresented faculty/post-doc students.

The Committee is pleased to learn that the University is taking concrete steps in diversifying its pre- and post-doctoral programs. This can have a positive effect into the “pipeline problem,” which is often cited as the main problem in hiring more URM faculty members. However, SCSEP feels that these programs will have to be significantly enhanced or scaled-up to accept a greater number of applicants in order to have any significant impact. For example, the pre-doctoral program accepts only three students per year, which is a very small percentage of our graduate student population. Perhaps a partnership can be arranged between the Office of the Provost, and individual schools to provide more fellowships for URM graduate & professional students.

SCSEP has a few suggestions on how to better advertise the URM pre-doctoral program. Some of the suggestions include (i) making a formal announcement about the program to all schools and departments and (ii) allowing schools to suggest candidates to the Office of the Provost (candidates might be better matched with a mentor). Finally, SCSEP will continue to deliberate on mechanisms to increase diversity in the graduate and professional student and faculty populations.

Continue discussion with Eric Furda, Dean of Admissions, involving strategies likely to yield applications from students from underrepresented groups.

Eric Furda, dean of admissions, expressed to the committee that Penn is becoming increasingly more socio-economically diverse since adopting President Amy Gutmann’s initiative to offer all grant and no loan financial aid packages to students with financial need. Compared to our peers, Penn is at the vanguard of enrolling students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, although our number of Pell Grant recipients as a percentage of class size can be misleading since we are the largest institution to have an all-grant no-loan policy. SCSEP is pleased to learn that Penn is faring better in attracting and admitting URM students than in previous years. Yet, the percentage of enrolled URM students at Penn is still relatively low compared to peer institutions. The SCSEP recommends “active or targeted recruiting strategies,” which can produce better yields. Penn could focus in regions of the country with high percentages of URM high-school students such as Puerto Rico, Florida, California, southwestern states (Native Americans), and Hawaii, as well as urban areas. Also, many URM and first-generation students are not aware of Penn’s no-loan

policy. Since financial burden is often the limiting factor for such students to attend college, it is important to better advertise and educate the public on Penn’s the no-loan policy.

### *5. Consider Charges for Next Year*

During the course of all our meetings, the Committee identified areas for continued work in the coming academic year. These topics are as follows:

- Continue conversation with Anita Allen, vice provost for faculty, on how to enhance and increase the number of URM students in our pre-doctoral and post-doctoral programs. It would also be of value to discuss strategies for recruiting and retaining URM faculty members.
- Meet with Zeke Emanuel, vice provost for global initiatives; Amy Gadson, executive director of Penn Global; and a representative from Student Financial Services for a more in-depth discussion on the financial issues regarding the Penn Summer Abroad and Study Abroad programs.
- Continue to get updates from Dean Furda on strategies to attract academically gifted students from under-represented minority groups. It would be important to understand and get to know the resources available to such students once at Penn so that they can thrive and be academically successful.
- Continue to discuss issues related to mental health and psychological well being with Dr. William Alexander and the CAPS staff.

### **SCSEP Committee Members 2014-2015**

Paulo Arratia, School of Engineering & Applied Science/MEAM,  
*Chair*

Anthea Butler, School of Arts & Sciences/Religious Studies

Laura Desimone, Graduate School of Education

Mauro Guillen, Wharton/Management

Sharon Irving, School of Nursing

Jorge Santiago-Aviles, School of Engineering & Applied Science/ESE

Jane Willenbring, School of Arts & Sciences/Earth and Environmental Science

*Ex Officio:*

Claire Finkelstein, Law School, *Faculty Senate Chair*

Reed Peyeritz, Perelman School of Medicine/Medicine and Genetics,  
*Faculty Senate Chair-Elect*