

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

General Committee Charge

The Senate Committee on Students and Educational Policy (SCSEP) oversees and advises the Senate 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 matters covered in Section IV of the University's *Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators*.

2016-2017 Specific Charges

1. Review the ways in which Penn communicates the availability of the mental health services it provides to students and faculty.
2. Continue to review the implementation and expansion of the Faculty Wellness Ambassador program.
3. Consider whether and how teaching evaluations can be used to assess classroom climate.
4. In collaboration with the Campaign for Community and any other appropriate organizations, convene an event that invites all members of the Penn community to engage in an active discussion on ways in which a welcoming environment can be created for all students on campus, especially first-generation students and those from low-income households.

Report & Recommendations

Over the course of the 2016-2017 academic year the SCSEP held eight regular meetings, one telephonic meeting, and an open forum. The committee primarily focused on issues related to behavioral health and wellness and the campus environment which represents both a continuation and extension of the previous year's SCSEP work. The committee also examined a proposal to change the academic calendar; this proposal was tabled. This report summarizes the Committee's recommendations across these two broad areas. The Committee did not address Charge #3 and recommends it be included in the charges for next year.

Initiative Inventory & Evaluation

Since the Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare promulgated its February 2015 Report, the University has launched a number of programs designed to improve student behavioral health and wellness. In part because the concepts of "psychological wellness" or "behavioral wellness" are particularly vague, the scope of these activities has been broad. Some of these activities are aimed at providing urgent support to students in psychiatric crisis or distress, such as efforts to expand Clinical and Psychological Services (CAPS) clinical operations and services and the addition of new rapid crisis response systems. Other initiatives aim to improve student wellness and the campus environment, such as the availability of wellness activities, i.e. massages and snack breaks, during exam weeks. The SCSEP recognizes the value of wellness activities across this broad spectrum of need. However, it is important to distinguish between and strategically prioritize, wellness activities and initiatives.

The SCSEP recommends that the Office of the Provost, with support from the SCSEP and appropriate faculty experts, conduct an inventory of all University initiatives that support student psychological wellness. SCSEP further recommends items in the inventory be categorized according either to specific student populations or to the level of the psychological, behavioral, or clinical risk they aim to address. SCSEP recommends the University publish this inventory and encourage school deans, department chairs, and other relevant administrative leaders to broadly and regularly communicate the availability of these resources to their constituents. Metrics of successful outcomes of these programs should be identified to facilitate the initiation of longitudinal studies by Vice Provost for University Life (VPUL) to measure the impact of each of the programs on the desired, but measurable outcomes. These metrics and evidence-based outcomes should be made publicly available in pre-determined increments.

SCSEP Mission and Charges

The SCSEP recommends that the Faculty Senate include student wellness as a standing charge for the SCSEP, amending its name to the Senate Committee on Student Wellness and Education Policy. The SCSEP would

therefore be charged with oversight and development of behavioral health and wellness programming at the University each year, including periodic review of metrics defined by the administration. In committing the SCSEP to this task, the Senate would send a clear message that the Faculty is dedicated to improving the psychological well-being of the student body.

Promoting Wellness Communication

SCSEP uncovered a number of communication gaps between students and faculty. Faculty and instructional staff should receive clear, regular communications providing instructions for addressing psychological distress among students. Direct communication between faculty and students concerning psychological wellness should be encouraged in the classroom. SCSEP recommends the University—to the greatest extent possible and with respect to and consent from students and families—maintain supportive contact with students who are on leave due to mental health conditions.

SCSEP recommends that all faculty and instructional staff include a statement on their syllabi that conveys the University policy on accommodations. This statement should be universal in nature such that no confusion across schools can be construed. The CAPS phone number should be printed on all student, faculty and staff PennCards. Faculty should receive CAPS information in email and hardcopy at the start of each semester. A banner on Canvas should be added that directs students to relevant wellness resources. In addition, communication across faculty governance structures—particularly SCSEP and the University Council—should be enhanced to synergize effort and activity on identifying and accomplishing common charges related to student wellness.

Finally, we urge University leadership to convey the importance of student wellness and available resources in Convocation and other important addresses to the entire University community.

Improvement & Oversight of Wellness Ambassador Program

In 2015, the Senate Executive Committee recommended that a Mental Health and Wellness Ambassador Program be piloted. This program was to provide special training for a core group of faculty members in schools and departments so that they could serve as a resource for their colleagues as questions about student mental health (best practices, campus resources, crises management) arose in their academic units.

The Wellness Ambassador Program has been launched and continues to expand across the University. Initially, Ambassadors were situated within the four undergraduate schools. There are now Wellness Ambassadors in those schools and in some of the graduate schools. This is a very positive development, as faculty members become more engaged in student behavioral health and find colleagues willing and able to assist them when encountering students in distress or crisis. There is at the moment no systematic evaluation regime in place for the Program, and individual Ambassadors have anecdotally expressed confusion about their roles and responsibilities. It will be critical to define these roles and identify metrics for success of this program and conduct ongoing evaluation.

The Faculty Senate and the SCSEP should provide support to the administrative leadership in recruiting Ambassadors, communicating to all faculty-campus wide the names of Ambassadors, and evaluating the impact of the Program. Faculty ambassadors should establish direct lines of communication with faculty and student leaders of mental health and wellness groups. The names of Ambassadors should be published on the corresponding faculty affairs website in each school, and a unified set of procedures should be in place for use across all schools. SCSEP stresses the importance these Ambassadors play as resources for students in need. It is important that the role of the Wellness Ambassador does not become overly burdensome on the part of the faculty member or serve as a substitute for interface with other mental health providers.

Fostering Behavioral Health Integration

Penn Behavioral Health is home to the nation's top clinical psychiatrists, psychologists, and other behavioral health providers and services. Yet, these resources are often out of reach to students, faculty, and staff. The SCSEP encourages Penn Behavioral Health and the Office of the VPUL, along with other key stakeholders within Penn Medicine and Penn Nursing, to design a

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pathway for students, faculty, and staff to gain affordable and timely access to clinicians and services of Penn Behavioral Health.

Support of Student Groups

Student groups (peer groups) often represent the front line of mental health intervention on campus. There are now over two dozen University-sanctioned groups committed to psychological or behavioral wellness. Some of these groups function independently and others are chapters of larger national organizations. The University provides financial support to these groups so that they can convene, develop programs, and offer opportunities to members and the student body. It is unclear how well integrated these groups are with the wellness and behavioral health infrastructure or their knowledge of each other.

The SCSEP recommends that student groups should receive increased financial support and training opportunities such as mental health first aid training, following the completion of an initial inventory of existing University-sanctioned groups in order to determine the extent to which their missions overlap so as to minimize duplication of effort and use of resources. Student leaders should be closely aligned with Faculty Wellness Ambassadors and extant university resources.

Counteracting Toxic Competitiveness

In its 2015 report, the Task Force on Student Psychological Health and Welfare correctly stated, "Like its peer institutions, Penn has a highly competitive academic and extracurricular culture that some students perceive to demand perfection. Such perceptions may lead to pressures to succeed both academically and socially that may be unrealistic and lead to feelings of being overwhelmed. Some experience depression or other forms of distress often evidenced by changes in behavior."

The SCSEP recommends that faculty and instructors remain conscientious about the level of course work and expectations for each student. Faculty should be prepared to accommodate individual requests for deadlines if a student appears to be in distress. Students should be educated about the health and well-being ramifications of taking on too many responsibilities and should be encouraged to set reasonable limits on their academic coursework and extracurricular activities and on the importance of periodic self-evaluation with respect to these concerns.

Social Media Use

The SCSEP recommends that programming be developed and provided to students concerning the impact of social media on psychological wellness. An emerging body of evidence suggests that social media use is correlated with mental illnesses such as depression and distressing situations arising from feelings of envy, cyberbullying, and sexting. A seminar series that includes interactive discussions and formal didactics on the impact of social media on mental health and wellness should be launched.

I CARE

The I CARE program has trained over 1,800 faculty, staff, and students at Penn. The SCSEP recommends that leaders at CAPS consider ways to incentivize participation in I CARE. As one hypothetical example, CAPS, in conjunction with relevant department chairs and deans, might consider developing a comprehensive I CARE course in which students could enroll and earn 0.5 course units. Upon completion of proper training, faculty members would also receive credit toward their teaching loads when they instruct student-focused I CARE courses.

In addition, SCSEP recommends that CAPS coordinate and integrate I CARE offerings within the College House and Academic Services, offering the program across the residential system for publicity and ease of participation.

University Recovery Center

The University currently lacks a robust infrastructure to support students who are recovering from addiction and substance use disorders. The

ideal infrastructure consists both of accessible support services and a physical environment for continued recovery, such as substance-free housing options and meeting spaces for recovery group meetings. The Association of Recovery in Higher Education offers resources and background on university recovery communities and programs at peer institutions as well as guidance for developing such programs. The SCSEP, VPUL, CAPS, Residential Services, and student leaders should convene an exploratory group with the aim of developing a plan for substance-free spaces and housing.

Revising the University Academic Calendar

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) established an Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Academic Calendar, which was chaired by SEC member Ron Donagi (SAS/Mathematics). The proposal generated from that Ad Hoc Committee was presented to SEC, which referred it to the SCSEP for further deliberation. The SCSEP invited Dr. Donagi and faculty colleagues from Wharton and Nursing who had cited concerns about the effect of the proposed calendar on academic life within those schools. The SCSEP also met with representatives from the Office of the Vice Provost for Education to discuss challenges related to implementing the proposed calendar should it be adopted. The School of Nursing cited concerns that the proposed calendar would not meet with Nursing accreditation standards and would also jeopardize relationships with clinical sites at which their students receive real-world experience. Other schools were receptive to the proposal or to generally exploring options to optimize the current University Academic Calendar. After due diligence was conducted and the SCSEP deliberated, it decided to table the proposal. The SCSEP recommends, however, that the Senate Tri-Chairs continue discussions with the Provost and the Deans to explore ways to optimize the current system. It invites input from members of the Penn community on this matter by writing the Senate Office.

Outstanding Charges

Because of time constraints and the complexities of other issues it reviewed, the SCSEP did not consider whether and how teaching evaluations can be used to assess classroom climate. It recommends this charge be continued to the 2017-18 academic year.

Recommendations to the 2017-2018 SCSEP

1. Continue to assist with the implementation and evaluation of the Faculty Wellness Ambassadors Program.
2. Consider the feasibility of the development of a Senate standing committee on Student Wellness, or consider requesting to the Faculty Senate that its name and general charge be amended to include student wellness (as described above).
3. Support and assist the University in exploring the development of a University Recovery Center and housing.
4. Consider whether and how teaching evaluations can be used to assess classroom climate.
5. Elevate the discussion of academic calendar revisions and monitor progress on proposals.

SCSEP Membership

Paulo Arratia, SEAS / MEAM & CBE
Laura Desimone, GSE
Sharon Irving, Nursing
Carol Muller, SAS/Music
Karen Redrobe, SAS/History of Art
Ralph Rosen, SAS/Classical Studies
Jorge Santiago-Aviles, SEAS/ESE
Dominic Sisti, PSOM/Medical Ethics & Health Policy, *Chair Ex Officio*:
Laura Perna, GSE, Faculty Senate Chair
Anita Summers, Wharton, PASEF non-voting member
Santosh Venkatesh, SEAS/ESE, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect

Senate Committee on the Economic Status of the Faculty

The 2016-2017 Senate Committee on the Economic Status of the Faculty published the Economic Status of the Faculty Report in *Almanac* February 28, 2017: see

The Executive Summary: <https://almanac.upenn.edu/uploads/media/022817-supplement.pdf>

The Full Report: https://almanac.upenn.edu/uploads/media/Senate_Committee_on_the_Economic_Status_of_The_Faculty_Fiscal_Year_2016_2015.pdf