

Committee on Student Life (CSL)
12-2pm, Student Center Coffeehouse Lounge
Minutes taken by A. Hansen

Minutes

I: Committee Member Introductions

Present:

Muriel Medard – Committee Chair – Professor of Electrical Engineering & Computer Sciences
Chris Colombo – Dean for Student Life, Next House Housemaster
Barbara Baker – (Guest member) Senior Associate Dean for Student Life
Paul Baranay – (Guest member) Undergraduate student, Speaker of the UA Senate
Alex Evans – Graduate student, School of Science, MacGregor GRT
Enectali Figueroa-Feliciano – Assistant Professor, Department of Physics
Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook – Director and Associate Dean for International Students Office
Astrid Hansen – Staff to the Committee – Admin Assistant in Office of the Dean for Student Life
Shee Shee Jin – Undergraduate student, School of Architecture & Planning, East Campus
MedLink
Steven Lerman – Vice Chancellor and Dean for Graduate Education, Warehouse Housemaster
Carol Matsuzaki – Associate Professor/Head Coach Women's Tennis, East Campus Associate
Housemaster
Norvin Richards – Professor, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
Vivek Sakhrani – Graduate student, School of Engineering
David Singer – Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, MacGregor Associate
Housemaster
Alexander Slocum – Professor of Mechanical Engineering, ESG Director, MacVicar Fellow
Christian Ternus – Undergraduate student, School of Engineering

Not present:

Nathan Pallo – Undergraduate Student, School of Engineering

The task of this committee is to discuss matters of student life. There will be issues discussed which are also covered by other committees and for this reason there will often be guests at the CSL meeting. It is up to the committee to set agenda for the year and thus suggestions are welcome.

- Several issues will be dealt with in a timely manner due to deadlines. For example, the Institute taskforce has been set in an effort to identify ways of reducing expenditures in order to meet the foreseen deduction budget (a billion a year) of the Institute. This would be an appropriate subject for the committee to discuss.
 - Muriel and Steve co-chaired a sub-committee on student life spending this past year, the findings of which are available online.

II: S^3 (Student Support Services): Presented by Dean Lerman

- A taskforce has been appointed by Chancellor Phil Clay and Tom Kochan to re-evaluate the short term and long term goals for S^3. The taskforce has the deadline of October 30th, 2009 to collect their recommendations. Due to this deadline, much has happened over the summer regarding this issue (not because of the fact that students were gone).
- The background on S^3 is that it is a service within the Division of Student Life which provides students, primarily undergraduates, with unofficial counseling (S^3 does have

Deans who are licensed therapists, but they are not Counselors under MA law). S^3 used to be a part of the Office of the Dean for Student and Undergraduate Education (ODSU) before it was split into the two fractions of Undergraduate Education and Student Life. S^3 moved with student life. It has always been the intent to reevaluate this decision, and several faculty members believe that S^3 might be better positioned under DUE or in the Chancellor's Office. When the financial crisis hit, a position had to be removed from S^3 and faculty were unhappy with this reduction in staff and wondered if S^3 would be able to continue providing the same historical support.

- One function of S^3 is to provide input to the Committee on Academic Performance to provide the background and context surrounding student issues, i.e., how the student is actually doing. Therefore, members of CAP want to know if S^3 will still be able to provide the same level of services.
- The S^3 taskforce is to evaluate the informational structure of S^3 (not to look into the layoffs, etc) and to give recommendations regarding the services that students need the most and the best ways to get these services to students. The taskforce has been meeting as groups and subgroups, and also with Housemasters, CSL, groups of students, faculty, CAP, and individual deans of S^3. The sorts of questions they would like input on are:
 - Do you have experiences with S^3 and how could they become better?
 - Should S^3 be a single integrated unit or divided into factions?
 - What should the relationships be between DSL, DUE, Mental Health and S^3?

How does each CSL member view S^3?

- Danielle: A support service for students in all kinds of trouble, particularly undergraduate students. S^3 informs faculty of student issues and they deal primarily with academic functions.
- Enectali: Does not have much experience or knowledge of S^3.
- David: It is separate from Medical & Mental Health and thus it is able to help students in less medically specific ways without as much of a stigma.
- Alex E: Has not had much personal involvement with S^3, but has referred many students to S^3 as a GRT. S^3 works as a nexus which routes students to the correct place on campus.
- Christian: S^3 is for students who are stressed, etc. and don't know who they should go to for help. S^3 serves as centralized location for students to get directed to Mental Health, Professors, Advisors, etc. There is also the perception amongst students that S^3 Deans are not administrators and therefore can be trusted with issues that they might not want to relate to professors. Does not want S3 to be split up because regardless of process efficiency you would lose the centralized aspect which is of great value.
- Alex S: Students feel ownership of S^3 and trust to go to the Deans located there when they are afraid of going directly to their professor or to Mental Health. Professors can trust the S^3 Deans because they know that S^3 has already filtered out students without legitimate reasons for help.
- Vivek: Doesn't recall S^3 being mentioned during graduate orientation programs, but it seems to have a similar service to that of the graduate advisor position who directs students to where they need to go for help.
- Steve: As a former professor, S^3 functions as a filter for students who are not comfortable coming straight to you. As a Housemaster, S^3 is a very useful source to direct students to. Statistics show that about 50% of the 4,300 undergraduate students visit S^3 over the course of four years. Students problems are often a collection of things (social, medical, etc) and academic problems are a symptom of those deeper issues which is why S^3 exists for unofficial counseling and not just advising.

- Carol: From her position as an Assoc. Housemaster and a Coach, she sees S^3 as a place where students feel safe to go when they don't want to see an official mental health person. S^3 feels more academic based and therefore students feel better and safer about going there. David Randall of S^3 gave a talk to the coaches about S^3 which was very valuable.
- Paul: S^3 fulfills an important academic function because MIT has splintered the advising system and a student's advisor can change many times. S^3 can navigate and intercede on the student's behalf when they have an academic problem.
- Barbara: S^3 is a nexus. For students who can't articulate their issue S^3 helps them find out what they need help with. The other aspect of S^3 is that it is a low barrier place which can help people get connected. Also, the Dean on Call system works very closely with both Medical and S^3 for follow up on student crises.
- SheeShee: Has heard both good and bad stories regarding S^3 as a MedLink. It is good that students don't have to go alone to S^3 but can take friends with them for support and the academic help side of S^3 is very useful. A lot of freshman have been going to S^3 with flu issues, and this is good in the sense that they have been exposed early to S^3 and will continue to use it. However, a problem is that people are often hesitant to go to S^3 because although you know what the result of your visit will be, you don't know who they are going to contact or what they are going to do to get you to that result (unless you specifically ask for that information).
 - Question: Does S^3 offer financial advising?
 - S^3 would connect students to financial services.
- Chris: S^3 is a place where students can be connected to other services. However, there is a screen of secrecy to a degree which creates a misunderstanding of what S^3 can and can't do. While S^3 will keep information as confidential as possible there is no official patient-client relationship that S^3 will be bound by in a court of law. Often students see S^3 as a substitute for receiving support when they should really be receiving it elsewhere (e.g., at Mental Health).
 - There are two confidentiality guidelines (S^3 has FERPA, Mental Health has Hippo):
 1. Hippo: In the medical arena, this is a privacy act that requires things to be private between doctor and patient.
 2. FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act): At an institution, a student has the right to access their record and decide how it may be shared with people. Their record cannot be shared without the student's permission except for in the case of safety, i.e., if the student might be of harm to themselves or others.
- Norvin: Learned about S^3 fairly recently through word of mouth, however, it is a very important service which faculty should know about.
- Muriel: Has been at MIT as an undergraduate, graduate, and faculty. As undergraduate didn't interact with S^3. As a faculty member doesn't feel that the information from S^3 is that useful because you don't know how long of an extension to give a student because you don't know how serious the issue is. As a Housemaster, S^3 has been very helpful to get students associated with the help they need.

Summary of CSL Members' Views of the functions of S^3:

1. Clearing house/nexus – serves as a portal which student can go to and be helped or be redirected to the proper place to be helped
2. Academic – students find S^3 very useful to be able to get advice and contact professors

3. Therapy – S^3 doesn't have the same stigma as Mental Health so students use S^3 for counseling. However, students may be under the impression that they are getting the same counseling that they would under an officially licensed Counselor.

Discussion:

- Faculty members are wonderful for advising, but they often just aren't around. A large number of freshmen also have non-faculty advisors who don't necessarily know about their undergrad program or how to advise them. Should there be an advisor center to assist students with academic problems?
 - * A possible future CSL agenda item could be how freshman advising occurs.
- Issue of advising vs. counseling:
 - Counseling can be used in many different contexts, there is the clinical term but there is also informal counseling/advising. It is hard to define the moment when an issue becomes a Mental Health problem because it depends on each person.
 - At least S^3 is a place where students can talk to someone. Isn't this better than having them talk to no one at all? It is very important for students to have place to go which they trust, and then if needed they can be redirected.
 - Students should be encouraged to go to Mental Health when appropriate.
 - S^3 helps with non-critical problems where Mental Health might not be useful.
 - There are schools which have Counseling centers which aren't under Mental Health. However, S^3 is not a counseling center in that same sense.
 - S^3 is a starting step to overcome the stigma associated with Mental Health.
 - * A possible future agenda item could be: What is Mental Health and who do they serve? What is the counseling service provided at MIT? Discuss Mental Health and Medical in general.
- An aspect not mentioned is that S^3 also works with student leaves and readmissions.
- Would like to see more transparency in S^3 so students know what is happening on their behalf.
 - On the other hand, many students might just want their problem solved and they don't care about the process, solely the overall result.
- Faculty and staff might rely too much upon S^3 as a pre-screening tool.

End of Meeting.