

Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate

ANNUAL REPORT: Fall 2021-Spring 2022

Committee Members: Scott Van Keuren (CAS), Matthew Carlson (CAS), Terry Delaney (Co-Chair, CALS), Steve Gove/Akshay Mutha (GSB), Jennifer Prue (Co-Chair, CESS), Karla Karstens (CEMS), Kris Stepenuck (RSENR), Denise Hersey (LIB), Devika Singh (LCOM), Sarah Twitchell (LCOM), Kenneth Allen (CNHS), Evan Siegel (SGA).

The 2021-2022 SAC Co-Chairs (JP, TD) will serve again in that role the next academic year.

Charge of the Student Affairs Committee

The SAC shall have responsibility for matters relating to student affairs, their effect on the educational process, and the academic climate of the University. It shall recommend policy with respect to honors programs, remedial programs, athletics, discipline, health service, placement, housing, student activities, etc. It shall include among its duties in-depth and ongoing review of University admissions and financial aid policies, including their relation to projected enrollments. This committee shall establish policy in matters related to general admissions standards and prerequisites, and shall review, recommend, and participate in formulation of admissions procedures. The committee shall establish a continuing liaison with student government groups and with all appropriate administrative and academic offices.

The student affairs committee (SAC) discussed many issues related to the academic climate and culture that surrounds our students, especially related to the lasting pandemic. This work included discussions of how students can be supported both in the admissions process as well as for matriculated students. Among the most impacted students, were those in their second year who had spent their first year in remote instruction and had not yet attended in-person classes at UVM. These students may be anticipated to require additional support, and some will struggle academically compared to students in another time. Of course, ongoing COVID-19 illness directly affected many students, creating unpredictable challenges to their well-being and academic performance. On top of that, many students experienced stress from family members or friends that were impacted by disease, and in some cases witnessed severe loss of health or life. Others have faced food or housing insecurity due to family job loss.

Some of the support measures the SAC discussed included the need to extend flexibility in the late withdrawal from courses due to COVID-19 or due to extenuating circumstances related to COVID-19 that played a significant role in the student's ability to progress in a course. Two resolutions were passed by the SAC for each semester to provide that flexibility.

Summary of Resolution: ...The SAC supports the Student Services Collaborative in their work with UVM students by granting additional flexibility in the reasons and specific documentation required to grant a late withdrawal request for a student. ...The Dean's office will ...determine whether extenuating circumstances related to COVID-19 played a significant role in the student's ability to progress in the courses or courses for which a withdraw is requested. Decisions will be made on a case by case basis...

The SAC met with Jay Jacobs (Vice Provost for Enrollment Management) to discuss measures to enhance recruitment and retention of students. The SAC had previously passed resolutions to recommend that admissions waive standardized tests as part of the application process. This was initially prompted by students being unable to access test sites due to the pandemic, and consequently not being able to take SAT or ACT tests. In our discussions we also considered equity issues related to standardized tests. In our final meeting of the year, the SAC voted to extend the test optional policy for three additional years (to total of five years, from the fall 2021 to fall 2026 admission cohorts). We will revisit this policy as data emerge on how students admitted under the policy are recruited, perform, retained, and form a rich and diverse admixture of students. Future discussions will examine whether a test optional policy should be made permanent.

In addition to advocating for test-blind admission, the SAC weighted in on other elements of the Admissions Strategic Plan involving student success and well-being. An issue the SAC is exploring involves the expectation of some instructors that their students participate in activities outside of the standard course meeting times. These out-of-class-expectations (OOCEs) are common in some programs and can create an unfair setting for students who for a variety of reasons, lack access to those activities.

To examine OOCEs, the SAC formed a subgroup (KA, SVK) to examine this issue that included our SGA member (ES). OOCEs can be problematic when an instructor schedules an activity outside of the course scheduled meeting times (e.g., an exam, meeting, seminar, or other expected activities), making it difficult for some students to participate. Indeed, even optional, for-credit activities themselves can be unfair to students that have restrictions on their participation. The SAC acknowledges that out-of-class activities can be highly enriching but believes that OOCEs should be provided in such a way that all students can benefit, without interfering with other scheduled courses or commitments. Additional problems arise from OOCEs that occur for students that have childcare or work responsibilities in addition to their academic commitments. OOCEs can also present equity challenges, and not provide equal access to students that do not have access to transportation, have disability issues, or experience other challenges.

Recommendations: The SAC would support policy to clarify what type OOCEs are appropriate, and that addresses how equity issues may be managed (e.g., by providing multiple options to fulfill an OOC objective). It is important that OOCEs be divulged in a course Syllabus and Expanded Course Description. Adjustments to the Students Rights and Responsibilities Policy and Student Code of Conduct Policy could address and clarify some OOCE issues. Discussion of the issue will be carried into the next AY.

The SAC discussed the uneven availability of expanded course descriptions (ECDs) in different colleges and departments. The Student Government Association representative to the committee (ES) shared data on the availability and quality of ECDs, which show large variation in compliance across units to provide meaningful ECDs. The SAC supports uniform provision of ECDs for all courses, which include sufficient detail that students can gauge workload, assessment, and expectations in a course.

The SAC met with Jay Dickinsen (Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Student Success) to discuss a Professional Boundaries Policy. The policy addresses amorous relationships between employees and staff with students, and the SAC supports policy to make clear the boundaries around such relationships. The SAC felt the title to the proposal ("Professional Boundaries Policy") was overreaching, and recommended it be named "Amorous Relationship Policy," or

broadened to include unprofessional relationships which are not amorous. The SAC encourages additional policies relating to other types of relationships to be addressed in the future. The SAC recommendation was unanimously approved, and forwarded to Faculty Senate President, Thomas Borchert, to be shared.

The SAC met with Dean Bryn Geffert (Library) to discuss the libraries' budget. The SAC requested that the Executive Council have a conversation about the Library budget to discuss how senate committees can work together in supporting the libraries. The SAC passed a resolution in support of the library budget, highlighting the key role libraries play in providing the intellectual infrastructure required for a university to thrive. *Resolution: The Faculty Senate calls on the leadership of the University of Vermont to support and fund the UVM library system to an extent comparable to peer universities that have R1 status, due to the critical intellectual infrastructure that the libraries represent.*

SAC members were selected/volunteered to support the following university committees:

- FS-EC member on Catamount Core Curriculum Committee (CCCC) (TD)
- Outstanding Advisor Award (KK)
- Senior Award Committee (JP)
- University Advising Committee (SVK, JP)

It was a busy year. The SAC remains committed to supporting students in any manner possible.

Report submitted by Terry Delaney and Jennifer Prue, Co-Chairs, Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate.

May 5, 2022