Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Arts & Sciences Council

Thursday, October 11, 2018

Call to Order (3:30 pm)

José María Rodríguez García (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the first order of business: approval of the September minutes. There being no corrections, the minutes were approved.

Rodríguez García then announced that there will be a brief update from the Committee on Classroom Space and Infrastructure (CSI). He well then introduce today’s main discussion on advising, invite the speakers to present, then open the floor for discussion.

Classroom Space and Infrastructure update

Carol Apollonio (Slavic & Eurasian Studies) announced that a lot of progress has been made. The committee has finished the first part of the charge, which is learning from administrators how decisions are made pertaining to all the different aspects of classrooms. The committee is now getting a good sense of the second part of its charge, which is ascertaining the faculty role in CSI decisions. Her impression so far is that it’s ad hoc. Someone has a complaint, they share it somewhere, a solution is found, then a new issue or the same rises up again. She thinks we can do better than that. One of the committee’s goals is to regularize a process for feedback. The third charge is collecting faculty complaints. The committee has received a large response from faculty with some things that can be easily solved, such as redesigning a room so that the AV screens don’t cover whiteboards. She’s very excited because so many of these little problems can be solved. Bigger issues will have to be shared with administrators. The CSI meets again next Wednesday, so if you haven’t already talked with colleagues to gather their input, please do so before next Wednesday. At that meeting, the CSI will try to separate issues into categories such as what is easy to solve now, what’s the biggest problem that needs to be shared with administration, and what is the seriousness of the problems. It’s a big job, but she is optimistic. Duke faculty are resourceful and have wonderful ideas.

They had originally talked about a town-hall meeting but the quality of information coming in is already so good, the town hall may be ineffective. Who’s going to take the time to come when you can just email us? The committee is leaning toward an online town-hall event to capture any additional information. The idea is to steer clear of Sakai, and instead provide a link to click on and write comments.

The next step is a Qualtrics survey. She’s talked with Matt Serra and anticipates a really good, short survey. Then in December, they will make recommendations. Today she’d like to have just a few
minutes for questions … and perhaps request faculty nominees for “room of shame,” that is, any room ever assigned to you that needs the most improvement in all areas.

**Jonathan Bagg (Music)** said this is not unlike the process we always do with business managers.

**Apollonio** said one issue that has come up fairly often is that business managers are super helpful with tasks like changing rooms, fixing something in rooms, moving someone down the hall, etc., and that’s been flying under the radar. She appealed to Council members again to send in information.

**Bagg** said if this becomes a yearly process, is there a way to make it happen automatically?

**Rodríguez García** then said he was reminded that there are quite a few new representatives on Council this year. He invited the new representatives and alternates in attendance to introduce themselves. He said at the next meeting, he’ll ask everyone to introduce themselves, but due to today’s inclement weather, he’d like to continue with the main agenda item.

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**Advising**

**Rodríguez García** then provided context on the first Council conversation on advising. ECASC called it the “first conversation” because they’d like to have another conversation in the spring. Hopefully by that time, the existing Committee on Faculty-Student Interaction will be active. The committee’s description in the bylaws says the main role of the committee is to find ways to “enhance advising.” After searching the archives, Rodríguez García found the committee was first mentioned in March 2004, but by the time he arrived at Duke in 2011, the committee had gone dormant. In the 1990s, there was talk of an A&S Committee on Student Life, but it was mentioned in writing only once, in 1998, and then never mentioned again so this committee may never have been appointed.

He reminded Council that late-stage conversations about the BluePrint curriculum proposal were dominated by the issue of advising. The proposal involved a radical transformation of students’ degrees of freedom and the onus we were placing on students choosing their own path. Students would make more “deliberate” choices, as we were told back then. A lot of faculty questioned how this would impact advising and whether we had the capability to deliver the new multilayered advising that would be necessary to make up for the attenuation of sequential pathways and the increased role of individual experiences and courses devised by the students themselves. Volunteers provide much of the general academic guidance students receive during their first semesters at Duke, and today we’ll hear more about this from our guest David Rabiner. How are the main pieces of advising (peer advising, advising in major, etc.) related to each other? So now seems to be a good time to have our first faculty conversation on advising. The committee will be active soon, so he encouraged Council members to suggest possible members, in either their own or other units, who are concerned about advising, who have participated in various forms of advising, and who would like the opportunity to be part of the group that will rethink the charge of the committee. So the committee will meet with stakeholders, such as the Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (DVPUE), the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of Trinity College, department chairs, etc.). After conversations, they will have the option to come up with a proposal for a new charge that will continue to emphasize advising but also will update membership to include as ex officio members from offices that handle advising, such as the Academic Advising Center (AAC). He added that this committee is under the direct responsibility of Council/ECASC, so it will have no joint jurisdiction with the deans. That being said, our deans and the DVPUE say they will give this committee full support and they want it to contribute to our collective thinking about the ongoing transformation of advising on campus.
He then introduced the speakers who will kick off today’s conversation. Each has a unique perspective on advising.

David Rabiner (AAC director) started by saying that in addition to being director of the AAC, he is also a senior associate dean of Trinity College and a research professor of Psychology and Neuroscience. His talk is about the advising structure for the pre-major level, the changes that have been implemented over the past few years, and some of the challenges they have. His office is part of the Office of Undergrad Education which is led by Gary Bennett. They oversee advising for Trinity College students from the time they matriculate, so they field about 1,200 phone calls and emails from the incoming class about registration and other things. They have primary advising duties for those students until the students declare their majors. Currently they rely on more than 280 faculty and staff volunteers from across the university to serve as college advisors. Roughly 30 percent of those advisors are faculty, and almost every unit is involved, including the Medical Center, Law, Athletics, Fuqua, and Alumni. In addition to the volunteer advisors, his office also has six full-time specialized advisors, called Directors of Academic Engagement (DAEs). Three DAEs work in global/civic engagement opportunities and advise students on how to weave these opportunities into their curriculum. The other three DAEs focus on the individual disciplines of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. He sees the disciplinary DAE’s as DUS’s of the division, in the sense that they have extensive knowledge of the majors, departments and opportunities in their respective divisions, and they do good job of making students aware of these opportunities as well as what makes most sense for students to pursue.

He then showed a graphic representing the advising network for students. His office has tried to publicize this information so students, faculty and staff are aware of the resources available. The advising network includes College Advisor, Academic Dean, Directors of Academic Engagement, Peer Advisors, Pre-Professional Advisors, Faculty & Other Advising Partners, and Major Advisors. Duke is pretty complicated these days and there’s much more to try and do and squeeze in than when most of us were in school. It’s really impossible for any single adviser to be aware of every opportunity. So as you go around the wheel, you see the main sources of advising support that his office encourages students to take advantage of. The college advisors are the volunteers he spoke about earlier. They are the only advisors in the network that students have to meet with, and they are the ones who make students eligible to enroll each semester. Every student has an academic dean assigned to them based on their first-year residence hall and these deans stay with them all four years. The DAE’s are a resource that is unique to Duke and the way they can assist students is really quite remarkable. His office trains and supervises a great group of peer advisors. Currently, there are 18 peer advisors who are sophomores through seniors and are trained to offer advice from the student perspective. They primarily work with first years, though they can continue further if necessary. Outside of his office, there are pre-professional offices such as those for health professions and law. Faculty are obviously an important resource, and his office tries to emphasize that students build relationships with faculty from the moment they arrive on campus. Other advising partners include the Career Center, which is one of the greatest proponents of liberal education on campus, and they try to get students over there in their first year because the Career Center can be more effective in dispelling the myth that major equals career. They also work closely with the Academic Resource Center, located upstairs from his office. Then, once students transition to a major, they get assigned an advisor in that major.

Rabiner said they are trying to educate students on opportunities available to them: they will get the strongest experience of advising within available resources if they use the current network. His office is also working hard to encourage the college advisors to go beyond just the transactional aspects of advising and really talk to students about their educational and personal goals, as well as what they want
from Duke and beyond. Surveys have shown that students value advisors who have those kinds of discussions. It’s no surprise that the strongest advising relies on building relationships and that takes time. That’s probably the biggest challenge for the advising volunteers who also have full-time jobs. He’s trying hard to get students to connect beyond the one required meeting per semester. Survey data indicates that if a student meets for only the required meeting (once per semester), about 3 percent describe that relationship as meaningful to them. If they meet one additional time for lunch or coffee, that rate goes from 3 percent to about 55 percent. So that’s a big return for not necessarily a bit amount of time.

Rabiner said faculty can support advising by volunteering to be an advisor. Another way is to help students understand the goals of curriculum. Faculty can disabuse students of the ideas that dispel the idea that curriculum requirements are “things to get out of the way,” and that they can then move on to what they really want to do. Faculty can also dispel the myth that major equals career. In last year’s class of sophomores who declared their majors, about 86 percent declared in the 10 largest majors. That means the remaining 175 students are spread out among the remaining 36 majors. A good part of that is driven by the idea that if they don’t major in something practical, they will be unemployable. That is not true. Finally, faculty can learn more about the DAE’s since they are a great resource.

**Grace Kim (Economics),** an associate professor of the practice of Economics, said one of her main roles is to serve as Associate DUS. She is also admissions director for the MA, which is a nice link for the undergraduates in discussions about graduate school, since a lot of students are not aware of what it entails to get into a master’s program or what research programs are. She said that looking at advising from an Economics perspective, one can talk about allocating scarce resources to unlimited wants while also dealing with constraints such as student needs or funding. As such, Economics tries to provide a clear advising structure as well as providing resources for students all along their pathway, from prospective students to students considering honors work.

[Copied from the Economics Department website: https://econ.duke.edu/ecoteach

Staff at the Economics Center for Teaching (EcoTeach) optimize student experiences by providing educational guidance, helping them navigate transitions within and beyond the department. Students can visit their respective program assistants to ask questions related to courses, program requirements and processes, EcoTeach-funded positions, and any university resources they may require.]

She said that EcoTeach is the structural gateway into the Department. It’s the centralized nerve center for advising and gives students a chance to collect documents and pick up pamphlets. It also gives them a sense of their progress toward the degree and creates clear pathways in terms of class scheduling and what they want to obtain from their Econ major or minor. At the same time, EcoTeach provides a support system so it’s a coordinated effort between the graduate and undergraduate curriculums. She and DUS Connell Fullenkamp work in tandem and often confer to determine the best approaches for any situations that arise. At the same time, they serve as the connection points for everyone in the Department, so they have good conversations with faculty and students who drop by or who attend events. While they have a basic structure to advising in place, they are always trying to innovate and add new elements.

For research mentors, there’s a formal structure so students can apply for a particular research mentor. These mentors assist with career advice or research focus, rather than helping students navigate the curriculum. This is a clear way for students to develop strong relationships with faculty early on, even in their freshmen year.
Economics is constantly innovating its curriculum. For example, some students were unable to commit to a two-semester honors sequence, so the Department created a 400-level independent study class for students to have the opportunity to do honors work.

In terms of outreach, they try to coordinate with student groups, including the Economic Student Union. The ESU gets direct funding from the Department but adopts an open membership structure, so through it anyone who has an inking of interest in Economics can gain exposure to the discipline. Campus resources are important, also. They go to a lot of events to connect with students. They’ve worked with the Academic Advising Center, to better communicate with prospective students so students will have a better idea of what to expect before declaring their major. Alumni groups become involved by reviewing honors work.

Chris Roy (Chemistry) is an associate professor of the practice of Chemistry with secondary appointments in Education and Marine Science and Conservation. He has a unique perspective on advising because he plays many roles. He’s a Faculty in Residence in Wilson as well as a college advisor, a pre-health advisor, and an alum. As Associate DUS, he advises minors/majors, and while the major is small, it’s fairly complicated in terms of classes and expectations of research. Because of his roles, he has seen evolution in advising up close. He sees the students moving in – he advises 12 students in Wilson weekly. He also meets with many students with medical school interests, many of whom go through Chemistry.

Since he has started advising, he has seen many changes through the years. One of the issues is ensuring students are aware of all the opportunities available to them. There have been so many new initiatives coming online (DukeEngage, DukeImmerse, Bass, etc.) that it’s important to make it clear that students don’t have to do everything, that they should learn early on when and how to opt out of some of the myriad opportunities available to them. His biggest challenge as a pre-health advisor is helping students plan when they are going to do things, like shadowing doctors, doing DukeEngage, getting into community service.

There’s been a great change in the way advising occurs with new dean model, which is when a student has a dean assigned to them based on where they live their first semester. There’s a network of pre-professional advisors, major advisors, and peer advisors. He’s come to appreciate the DAE’s more and more as he’s worked with them over the years. So he wants to make sure that students know about the resources available to them and he encourages them to meet with more than just their college advisor.

Another thing Roy has noticed is that students coming in now are more ready to do research earlier, so it’s important to make sure they understand the opportunities for research both within and outside the Department. The DAE’s have been instrumental in helped students navigate the research waters.

He closed by saying that with close to 20 years of advising experience, he’d welcome any and all questions.

Rodríguez García thanked the presenters and opened the floor for questions. He reminded the Council that the goal of today’s conversation was to share experiences on how these different pieces of advising can cohere in an efficient and productive network of support for our students. He asked if students need to be motivated further to take advantage of all the advising opportunities available to them.

Rabiner said that his office believes every student would benefit from meeting with a DAE in the first year of study. In reality, about 30 percent do that. He said making students aware of resources is super hard. The DAE program is in its 7th year, and every week they promote it in the first- and second-year
newsletter; however, at end of the year, 50 percent of those classes have never heard of it. Many pre-health students don’t even know that they have a pre-health advisor. One would think it would be a simple problem to solve, but it hasn’t been.

**Chris Walter (Physics)** said Physics is a relatively small department, and when he talks to students who want to do research or eventually become majors, he often hears from them that the people they are talking to, don’t know anything about his department. He wondered if a simple change could help with this. In principle there are some majors like his that are sequenced and if a student misses something in the first year, it will cause problems later on. So it would be better to talk to them earlier rather than later, but they have no way to communicate with them before they decide on becoming Physics majors. As far as he knows, there is no mailing list of students who indicate an interest in Physics when applying. Physics has designed a course for students who might be interested in the major, and this would be useful information to forward to them in some fashion early on.

**Val Konzcal (Trinity)** said that before first-year students register in the summer, they have to fill out several surveys and one of those deals with interest in majors and certificates. She queries this data and sends names and email addresses to several departments who have asked her for this information. She is happy to do this for every program.

Walter thought that was a good idea. He also suggested sending all students a list of departmental contacts and email addresses, as well as information on student groups. This information would also be helpful in the recruiting stage as well.

**Ron Grunwald (Biology)** said he’s been DUS long enough to remember when it was a requirement in the declaration process that students looking at a department had to meet with the DUS. He thinks it was a courtesy of the AAC to do away with that requirement because it was burdensome, but now students are not meeting with the DUS’s.

**Sarah Schott (Mathematics)** said she has requested the email list from Konzcal’s office and it’s been great. What they do is dump the emails into a list serve and give students an option to unsubscribe if they want. They use this list serve for departmental events and talks and registration information, and they have found it to be useful.

Konzcal said students can list up to five departments. She has access to this data in July and she can start sending to everyone.

**Chantal Reid (NSOE)** has also been getting the list and finds it very useful. Going back to Grunwald’s comment, she thought it was highly recommended that students do talk to the DUS. She sees them.

**Rabiner** said they try to get the advisers to recommend that students connect with their DUS’s early on. Many students think the DUS is for majors only. While departments and other units encourage students to request advising or other consultation meetings, they do not require an “advising appointment” because it would be hard for departments with really large majors.

**Rodríguez García** reminded the Council that one of Dean Ashby’s goals for the first- and second-year curriculum is to get students high quality contact with experienced teachers who would also be interested in spending some time with the students. It seems like something emerging so far in the conversation is that in addition to the varieties of advising (mentorship guidance, intellectual direction, residential advising), there’s also the information piece. How are these advising components connected and how can we make advising more visible across campus among our peers while educating students on how better to take advantage of existing services and opportunities.
David Malone (Education) said he appreciated hearing about the taxonomy of advising since it seems there’s a difference between informational advising, which is transactional, versus mentorship, which is potentially more transformative. They require different amounts of time and skill sets. One thing that has become clear more than ever is that there are a lot of advising opportunities, and the chart presented today doesn’t include things like identity centers, cultural centers, DukeEngage, and Study Away programs. There’s an enormous amount of advising going on, but how do students experience this? Do they experience a sense of network or are they overwhelmed? How much do they use the available advising services?

Konzcal said she thinks students are pretty overwhelmed. They come to Duke and are given names of all these people to know and to help them and it’s pretty overwhelming.

Malone asked what would meet their needs better?

Konzcal said they started having the same college advisor for four years but she doesn’t know if that system has really worked.

Kim said the students are overwhelmed not so much by the different advisors but by the opportunities. It’s like a fire hydrant of information coming at them and they don’t know what to do with much of it. A lot of them rely on word of mouth from their peers more than they rely on family and advisors. In her mind, the network isn’t as connected as it could be.

Catherine Admay (Sanford) said she thinks that with all the information available, students choose who’s most credible and who will help them with the information that they care about the most. She’s been told by her advisees that fraternity brothers are trusted more than anyone else and are a strong informal network for them. Students without that informal network are operating at a disadvantage because they won’t know the “word-on-the-street” knowledge that other students will know.

Rodríguez García wondered if this highlights, however indirectly, the centrality of residential advising in that residence halls are places where students talk to each other and share information outside of the formal channels provided by the University. Residential Life has numerous formal educational and advising initiatives in place, so while we’re not addressing this topic today, we may organize a future Council conversation on Residential Life where formal residential advising as well the “word-on-the-street” will be a focus of attention. He asked Roy if he knew where students advise each other informally most often.

Roy said he hears more about students talking with their peers and where that happens is everywhere. The problem with that is sometimes the advice is not good.

Admay said that students get what they want, which is how to get an internship and a job. They have very set ideas that are pre-professional. She has been a faculty in residence and she has seen the peer advising network in action. Peer advising really matters, though the quality varies.

Bagg said that as a pre-major advisor, he may know things about a student that a dean wouldn’t know, such as whether a student can handle a certain amount of credits or course loads. He wondered if we should pay attention to that direction of advising.

Reeve Huston (History) wanted to comment on the idea that people feel overwhelmed. For future discussions, it would be good to go back to how to gear advising so students can filter things out. While it’s good to encourage students to talk to many members of their network, there is a need to recognize when it’s too much. There may be a need to simplify.
Rodríguez García said the Office of Student Affairs offers advice to help students identify strengths, goals, time management skills so they can make decisions and without reservation opt out of several activities or courses and better focus so as to optimize their time. It seems, though, that we need to do a better job with assisting students in not getting overwhelmed with the checkbox mentality.

Malone likes the idea of filtering. Another word that comes to mind when talking to students is coherence. It seems that students are collecting experiences, but they are not necessarily connecting them or finding coherence in them. They need help with that but that’s a hard thing to do because they’re involved in so many things. That’s all part of their identity or else it’s something they are passionate about. But how to connect all these things cohesively is difficult for them to articulate or figure out. He also wanted to push back on Admay’s comments. He’s in favor of peer advising, but sometimes there has to be interruption and disruption, and somebody has to question what a student is doing. That’s sometimes a little uncomfortable and he’s not sure students will receive that input from peers. It’s something faculty have to provide.

Admay agreed.

Konzcal said she’s been a college advisor for decades as well, and her experience is that students are very afraid of faculty. It’s easier for them to talk to their friends. So not only do they like the informal channels of information, but feel they’re safer. She’s done a lot of role playing on how to talk to a faculty member.

Marcia Rego (TWP) asked if there were something like a tutorial to help students know what’s available? Perhaps something gamified or an interactive quiz so they know these options exist?

Rabiner said there is a video but nothing gamified.

Rodríguez García said that once the advising committee is activated, hopefully members can gather ideas and information from many departments and other units. They will likely come up with some recommendations to discuss in Council on strengthening the network and making it more accessible to students as well as increasing student faith in the network itself.

Apollonio said that as a long-time advisor, she’s seen what a great job is being done by the AAC and the DAE’s. Her thought is how to make the network better fit into the Duke culture. What happens when students go to a party and they’re making decisions on their major? How can this be a conversation about some toxic aspects of Duke’s undergraduate culture?

Rodríguez García said that it would likely make a difference for the better if we could do something to help students become better socialized within the networks of academic advising so they don’t become socialized by default into the underground culture of peer advising.

Apollonio said it happens, and how do we deal with it, and it’s not by trying harder to do what we do. But getting a little higher, how do we incorporate this into a larger discussion of undergraduate culture.

Aimee Kwon (AMES) said that this is the first year of the Asian American Studies Program, which she directs. She is learning quite a lot about the huge division between students and faculty. She thinks there’s an opportunity to let students do the work we’re talking about by reaching out to them. She has found that affiliate groups are doing advising in their communities and the faculty aren’t part of that conversation. If you could actually go to the fraternities and student groups and let the students help you. That’s one way she’s been doing this in the AAS program. She felt as if we’re triple advising, so the
question is how to bring Student Affairs and faculty together to fulfil an advising role jointly and comprehensively.

Mark Olson (AAHVS) wanted to echo that the majors mixer that was hosted a few weeks ago was an informal event with faculty not representing departments per se in a social space with some food. He was amazed at the students’ questions and their willingness to engage. He’s finding a similar situation with the humanities lab model that we’re beginning to develop, but those students are coming in later in their career. Having spaces to connect is important. However, he doesn’t know how to effectively reach out to students in their first week or month of class.

Rodríguez García asked Olson if new initiatives have more deliberate advising because they are new and we are not as invested in the basic forms of advising, like the sequencing in departments.

Olson thought it was also because we are lowering the bar of entry. Students are afraid to come talk to us in our offices. He really likes the idea of connecting with Student Affairs.

Reid asked if there is a way to incentivize more faculty to participate in college advising early on.

Rabiner said about 90 faculty serve as college advisers, and that’s about 30 percent of the total college advisors.

Malone supports Kwon’s and Olson’s idea about meeting students where they are in more informal settings. One challenge for us is the bifurcation of Trinity’s Academic Affairs and the Office of Undergraduate Education, on the one hand, and Student Affairs, on the other. East Campus features opportunities for faculty to do more things in the residential setting and not outsource that directly to Student Affairs. Have faculty, food, and people coming together. It would take some organizational structure, but a lot of good things could come out of it.

Roy said the problem with that is a lot of activities are later in the evening and faculty don’t want to come back to campus after hours.

Rodríguez García said a good take–away from this conversation is that the opportunities for advising are managed by the offices of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Vice President for Student Affairs. They are trying to fulfill the same needs by using different instruments.

Walter said he is a majors advisor and when he thinks about those interactions, he thinks they are shallow. Mostly he’s going through a checklist to make sure students are on track with their classes. He thinks the advising he does that’s most useful isn’t in the system at all. He sees students in his research group at least once a week for at least a year. Those students are coming by all the time and when it’s time for them to start thinking about graduate school or a career, they are sitting in his office talking a lot. He thinks the only consequential advising he does is with students with whom he has a deep relationship. The thing that would be most consequential would be to have ways to increase that kind of engagement, but it’s not obvious how that type of high-touch advising would interact with a formal system. Students who meet with him only once a year with a checklist don’t feel comfortable talking about their plans.

Malone said that’s being a mentor, which is more than advising.

Walter thought that once you had that mentoring relationship, it’s easier for students to ask about classes to take or for letters of recommendation.

James Roberts (Economics) said he thinks that what Walter does is advising. As Kim mentioned, Economics has created the structure of EcoTeach, where there’s a number of staff members that can help
students deal with the checklist questions. Then the organic interactions with faculty are naturally more informal. He does a lot of the same type of advising as Walter does, often after class. Those questions are going to be deeper ones because students already have access to answers for the checklist questions.

Reid followed up by saying that a lot of the advising she does is informal. Students come to talk to her because she had taught them. All of those informal advising situations are not recognized, but she thought they were the most important.

Walter wanted to add that when we set up systems to encourage students to do a million things, it works against the engaged advising. He’s tried to make the case before that there’s nothing wrong with someone who wants to major in one thing and work closely on one topic.

Rodríguez García said this was a good discussion. He reminded Council members to nominate colleagues for membership on the Faculty-Student Interaction Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.