

Final Report: Student Affairs Committee 2023-2024

This year the Student Affairs Committee met eight times including our Potluck Lunch in December. Our membership is as follows:

Senators

Naida Simon (Chair, Fall 2023)		
Stephen Chrisomalis (Chair, Winter 2024)		
Daisy Cordero	David Edelman	Michael Horn
Christine Knapp	Lisa O'Donnell	Rachel Pawlowski
Shauna Reeves	Brad Roth	Stephanie Tong

Liaisons and Non-Senate Members :

David McGrann	Jennifer Lewis	Jessica Greenwald
David Strauss	Vansh Bhardwaj	

Some of the key matters we covered included:

Housing and Dining

SAC received a broad introduction to housing and dining policies from Trish Romer, our new AVP and Chief Housing officer. There remain real challenges to occupancy despite the end of pandemic restrictions. Dining and the contract with Aramark remain an area of continued interest and concern with the contract being up for renewal in 2025. Student guests at the meeting were invited to express concerns with fees charged to student accounts for purported damages to Towers Apartments rooms that could not be substantiated. There is a need for better scrutiny of these charges going forward to ensure that students are treated fairly.

Medical Withdrawal Policy

A long-overdue change to the Medical Withdrawal policy was discussed extensively at SAC, and eventually ratified at the November Senate plenary. This policy removes obstacles to students seeking to withdraw from courses for valid medical reasons. The new policy ensures that students who have a valid health reason are able to withdraw from classes at any time during the semester with no withdrawal grade on the transcript, with 100% tuition reimbursement. It will also permit students with a valid medical reason for withdrawing from some (but not all) classes to do so, whereas previously only full withdrawal was allowed. The committee recommended changes to the composition of the Medical Withdrawal committee and to the timeline for responding to withdrawals that were not approved at the Senate.

Warrior 360 Program

The Warrior 360 program is a by-invitation program designed to support students who need additional assistance to succeed in their academic programs. Most of these students are eligible for the Heart of Detroit and Wayne Guarantee financial support, and Warrior 360 provides academic and social support. It is a “high touch” program that includes a summer residential experience, frequent well-being check-ins through the year, and academic success monitoring.

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Academic Success Center

The ASC includes three components: Study Skills Academy, Peer-Assisted Learning, and Math Literacy. Students can make virtual or face-to-face appointments through the success.wayne.edu website. While these workshops are mainly targeted at undergraduates, some programs like study skills coaching are available to graduate students.

First-Year Interest Groups

First-year Interest Groups (FIGs) provide ideal cohort schedules taken by a block of students who share a common major, learning community, or interest affiliation. Course blocks are designed to fulfill general education and early major requirements that will scaffold future coursework. The goal of FIGs is to increase student engagement and retention early in students' time by providing both classroom and co-curricular experiences, supported by faculty and peer mentors. Since Fall 2022 the program has expanded from 405 to 535 students and has strong year-over-year retention. While there are challenges to FIGs, most notably on the registration / administration system through Banner, and support for interdisciplinary FIGs, the program has been successful on the whole and is recommended for expansion where feasible.

Celebration of Naida Simon

The SAC celebrated and recognized the long service of Naida Simon upon her retirement from the Senate, the Student Affairs Committee, and Wayne State in early January, after decades of service. We recognize the thousands of students whose academic lives at WSU she has influenced positively and thank her for her tireless efforts as long-time SAC chair.

Office of Military and Veterans Academic Excellence

The Gadson OMVAE serves our student veterans by providing academic and social support services appropriate to this specialized student population. A major part of OMVAE's purview is ensuring that students have access to the full range of benefits available to them as veterans, including benefits processing, federal, state, and university tuition assistance, academic support, transfer credit, and social support. A particular area for future interest are the specific needs of veteran graduate students, who comprise one-third of our veteran students but whose needs and goals differ from undergraduates.

Campus Plan and Maintenance

We met with administrators and staff who have responsibility for the revised WSU Campus Plan being put in place to ensure that we have sufficient and well-maintained facilities for student needs, as well as more generally to discuss maintenance issues. It is widely recognized both that there are campus buildings that are presently under-utilized (especially since the end of pandemic restrictions) and that many buildings are in need of severe repair (with hundreds of millions in deferred maintenance). We need to ensure that any changes to WSU's footprint in Midtown are to the advantage of students, rather than simply reflecting narrow financial considerations. Maintenance issues such as elevators, HVAC, and parking structures are in some cases dire.

Graduate Admissions

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Graduate Admissions is housed in the Graduate School and is the centralized admissions and recruitment office for all 230+ graduate programs at the university. There has been a rapid increase in applications this year (+124% PhD, +290% Master's), largely due to the removal of application fees along with removing language testing requirements for several African countries. It remains to be seen whether visa and funding challenges will allow us to convert this to actual registration. As the office only has two front-line staff plus one director who answer all inquiries, process transcripts, ensure compliance with policies, and communicate with graduate directors, there are presently severe backlogs in responsiveness. A lack of fit between institutional and college/division recruitment goals and Graduate Admission practices is a further concern. SAC will continue to monitor this situation.

Forager One and UROP

Our old student research portal, UROPConnect, has long been recognized as needing replacement and being useless for its present purpose. A new vendor, Forager One, has been contracted to provide a powerful portal for matching students and faculty. It will allow faculty to post and advertise projects in a new, useful searchable platform. This system will pull directly from our faculty webpages' Content Management System so that faculty do not need to update multiple profiles. While there have been some small glitches, largely resulting from our CMS being used in different ways across schools and colleges, these have almost entirely been resolved and the system will be fully operational in the immediate future, which will be vital for the UROP program which is a central part of the president's College to Career initiative.

Artificial Intelligence Policies

In conjunction with the Curriculum and Instruction committee, we heard information and discussed changes to policy reflecting new developments in AI technology. New language is being proposed for the Student Code of Conduct that will help clarify institutional policy, while recognizing that the technology is changing rapidly and problems of using large language models like ChatGPT are not going away. AI detection software is currently unreliable at the level required to presumptively demonstrate Code of Conduct violations.

DFW Rates

In conjunction with the Curriculum and Instruction committee, we discussed DFW rates, i.e., the percentage of students in a course or program receiving a grade of D, F, or W. DFW rates remain relatively flat across the university but vary enormously by course and major. There is a strong institutional commitment to not interfere with faculty assignment of appropriate grades for coursework – there will be no dictates from above, and any of this data from Institutional Research must be used with caution. We are aware, though, of individual courses and programs where administrators have singled out instructors for high DFW rates. At present, only a small set of administrators and staff have access to all the data on grade rates.

Prison Education Program

The Wayne State PEP is a new initiative in the developmental stages. As proposed, it will lead qualified incarcerated people in the Macomb Correctional Facility (a men's prison in northern

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Macomb County) to earn in-person degrees in Sociology with a certificate in Entrepreneurship and Innovation while incarcerated. The challenges to establishing such a program include finding interested faculty, working with the limitations of technology possible at the MCF, and managing various state and institutional policies and bureaucracy. The current goal is to pilot a cohort of 25 students for the Fall 2025 semester. Very few colleges and universities in Michigan, and no research-intensive universities, offer similar programs. Recognizing that this program is in its early stages still, the committee is supportive of further work on this program.

Additionally, we would like to thank our various guests and visitors throughout the academic year:

- Patricia Romer
- Ashley Sweeney
- Darryl Gardner
- Latonia Garrett
- Angela Zanardelli
- Kelly Dormer
- Matthew McLain
- Ashley Flintoff
- Rob Davenport
- Joanna Janicka
- Sherry Quinn
- Matt Orr
- Richard Pineau
- Darin Ellis
- Cathy Barrette
- Michelle Jacobs

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Chrisomalis, Chair