

CASL Meeting Minutes #9
February 7th, 2022
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Meeting held via Zoom

Attendees: Scott Barton (Chair), Francesca Bernardi (Secretary), Paul Reilly, Arne Gericke, Jeannine Coburn, Greg Snoddy, Meha Chopra Mohapatra. Invited guests: Rachael Heard (Associate Director, Multicultural Education and First-Generation Success).

Agenda

1. Call to order

Chair Barton called the meeting to order at 11:06 AM.

2. Review of 2017 report “Recommendations on Improving Academic Advising at WPI”

Paul Reilly, Francesca Bernardi, and Rachael Heard will report on this at the next CASL meeting.

3. Academic Advising Day

There have been discussions of adding activities to promote mental health on Academic Advising (AA) Day.

- CASL believes AA Day should prioritize advising, which is important to reduce students’ stress and anxiety about the future and their current standing at WPI.
- Students are overwhelmed and we should not add on to their plates. One option could be to consider scheduling extra events on the following day (02/25, Reading/Makeup Day) but it may just be better for the students to take the day off.
- Greg Snoddy underlines that AA Day should be guaranteed as a day off for graduate students as well.
- Paul Reilly will share with CASL the email he plans to circulate to faculty in preparation for AA Day.
 - Courses schedules for next year will not be ready for AA Day.
 - Jeannine Coburn suggests delaying AA Day to D-term to make sure schedules are available.
 - **Action Item: Paul Reilly and Arne Gericke** will bring this up as a factor to keep in mind when planning AA Day for the future.
- **Action Item: Scott Barton** will reach out to Mark Richman to inquire about campus-wide events on advising day and suggest the possibility of limiting activities to advising.

4. Departmental Advising Practices

CASL wants to survey Departments on their current advising practices and their plans for Academic Advising day 2022.

- Paul Reilly suggests the possibility of sending a short Qualtrics survey to Department Heads to gather some information.
- **Action Item: Scott Barton** will create a template email to reach out to Departments/Programs on campus.
- **Action Item: each member of CASL** will reach out to 1 or 2 Departments/Programs to ask about their existing advising practices.

5. Wellness / Physical Education

Dana Harmon (Director of Physical Education, Recreation, and Athletics) is preparing a proposal for CAO to rename the PE requirement to “Wellness and PE” requirement so that more courses can qualify and there is more flexibility of content.

CASL likes the idea of restricting some 1000-level courses to first-year students and using them as an educational opportunity to teach well-being, skills to thrive at WPI, time-management, intro to college, etc. These courses could potentially be counted to fulfill the Wellness and PE requirement.

- Scott Barton mentions that HUA is moving forward with a similar proposal lead by Joe Cullon. He will keep CASL posted on the progress of this initiative.
- Jeannine Coburn suggests potentially using a HU/FY code for these courses so that they are restricted to first-year students (similarly to what is done for the Great Problems Seminar). Maybe using PE/FY could be an even better option to attract more students since they would be able to satisfy the PE requirement; the goal should be to serve 90-95% of first-year students.
- Paul Reilly mentions that one option could be to initially restrict registration for these courses to exclude non-first-year students. First-year students could sign up in the summer before they arrive at WPI; then, if there are extra open seats left as A-term starts, older students can enroll as well.
- Arne Gericke reminds us that one of the nice aspects of the educational setup at WPI is that it is reasonably simple to switch majors compared to other institutions; as such, we need to be careful with imposing stringent requirements during the first-year to make sure we do not remove this possibility for students.
- Arne Gericke also warns us to be careful not to overload the students in their first-year. In his experience, there seem to be a lot of students taking first-year courses later on in their academic career.
 - Paul Reilly mentions that this is often due to students not being able to take the courses they are interested in because they are full in their first year, so often advisors recommend waiting to take them later if students are very invested in a specific topic. This is happening more and more with arts, music, and generally with a lot of HUA courses. Limiting enrollment to first-year students for entire courses or specific sections could be a solution to this issue as well.
- Jeannine Coburn suggests making sure data is collected on these courses to see how many students are actually taking part in them and what is the impact on those populations.
- Francesca Bernardi mentions that if we want to target specific populations amongst the first-year class, we could suggest a program similar to the Chancellor’s Science Scholars at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<https://chancellorsscience-scholars.unc.edu/>).
 - Arne Gericke says that the Connections program at WPI (<https://www.wpi.edu/offices/multicultural-affairs/success-programs/connections>) is launching new initiatives in 2022 targeting students of color and 1st generation students with a bridge-type program. These groups will also continue in the program throughout their first-year. There have been discussions to have students live together on campus and be enrolled in the same courses. This is a big scheduling challenge, especially as majors broaden away from STEM, and so it is not likely it will happen in 2022.
 - Rachael Heard is working with Kathy Chen (Executive Director of the STEM Education Center) to develop a course for E2 2022 and a series of workshops for first-year students in A.Y. 2022/2023 to develop students’ skills directed specifically towards thriving on campus and well-being.

6. Communications plan with rationale for 7-week terms

Jeannine Coburn reached out to Allison Duffy, Director of Strategic Communications in the Marketing and Communications Office, who is now investigating what information and materials are still available from the past.

7. Centralized domain in Workday for looking up network of support

Scott Barton discussed this within the Technology subcommittee of the MHWB task force.

- Paul Reilly reminds us that on Workday there is already a list of advisors for each student. An option could be to extend the list to include experts in specific areas: for example, someone specific for first-generation students, or in financial aid, etc.
 - We must keep in mind that these lists are created via manual data-entry. We do not want to implement lists that need to be updated each term.
- We should be careful about who we are listing as part of the network of support. For example, Emily Perlow is concerned about overburdening student leaders.
- Greg Snoddy suggests using a student-focused item on the hub rather than hidden in Workday to contain all this information. Jeannine Coburn agrees that Workday may not be the right platform to make this information easily accessible and forward-facing.
- Student Affairs is meeting on Tuesday at 3pm; Greg Snoddy is leading the meeting and Paul Reilly will also be there representing CASL to discuss this further.

8. Student account holds

The issue of financial holds being placed overnight on students accounts right before course registrations may have been a one-off issue for this past Fall due to the fact that students registered in September '21 for Spring '22 courses.

- The administration offices acknowledge that this was an issue and are prepared to act proactively next time so that it doesn't happen again overnight.
- They also want to make holds more forward-facing so that students don't have to open a worklet to figure out whether they have a hold and what the hold is about.
- Jeannine Coburn suggests having a portal, with a warning if students have holds on their accounts, that serves as the sole way for students to reach course registrations. This way, students cannot get around seeing the warning (if any) to get to registration. Sarah Miles will bring this up to IT to see how they can address student awareness with existing holds.
- Arne Gericke wants to make sure holds affect course registrations and transcript requests only but not Canvas access for current terms. Greg Snoddy says WPI is pretty flexible when it comes to these issues and students are not stopped from accessing Canvas if they have holds on their accounts.

9. Adjournment

CASL will reconvene in two weeks. The meeting was adjourned at 11:59 AM.

Minutes prepared by:

Francesca Bernardi
CASL Secretary