

Minutes of the Committee on Academic Operations (CAO)
Meeting #4 of AY 2021-22

Date and Time: Tuesday September 28, 2021, 11:00AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Virtual meeting via video conference

Attendees: D. Cote (ME), L. Elgert (SSPS), M. Ephraim (HUA), A. Gericke (CBC, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies), K. McAdams (Academic Programs), S. Miles (Registrar), P. Musacchio (CBC, Secretary), P. Reilly (Assistant Dean of Student Success), G. Rios (undergrad rep), L. Titova (PH, Chair), Andrew Palumbo (AVP for Enrollment Management, the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid)

The meeting was called to order by Prof. Titova at 11:04AM.

Old Business:

1. CAP is looking into the posthumous and in memoriam degree policy and was supportive of CAO's motion.

New Business:

1. L. Titova welcomed A. Palumbo (AVP for Enrollment Management, the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid) to the CAO meeting and summarized the queries CAO had pertaining to the enrollment size of the Class of 2025. In short, the committee thinks it would be important for the faculty to understand the factors that may have contributed to the high yield and to establish an open line of communication in preparation for the next enrollment year. Specifically, was WPI's test-blind admissions policy a factor for this year? CAO would like to know how can we be better prepared as a university to handle unexpected numbers due to COVID going forward.

2. A summary of A. Palumbo's presentation:

a. The timing of COVID impacted the acceptance rates for the Class of 2024 in a way that was not consistent for the Class of 2025. Admissions relies on participation in admitted student events as a metric for estimating acceptance rates, but these were unreliable this past spring due to a switch to remote recruiting. Virtual engagements are less effective as a gauge.

b. This is a nationwide phenomenon: "Enrollment managers are flying blind: almost all the instruments colleges would normally use to predict the fall are broken" [The Chronicle of Higher Education \(March 9, 2021\)](#).

c. Class 2025 update:

- ✓ increases in women (35 to 43%)
- ✓ underrepresented students of color (13 to 14%)
- ✓ Pell-eligible student (10 to 11%)
- ✓ we are among 32% of colleges who made their class by the May 1 deadline

- ✓ wound up above our target range: goal approx. 1335, actual was 1417 (pending final count)
 - ✓ total UG enrollment goal: 4950, actual is 4982.
- d. We aren't outliers in our market segment.
- e. WPI needs more transparency about communicating 5-year plan for enrollment.
- f. WHY DID WE END UP OVER THE TARGET RANGE? Estimation of the 'melt' was off, it was significantly smaller than predicted. Reasons not yet clear. Melt is the % of enrolling students who defer or withdraw. To predict, they use historical data.
- when COVID hit – projected 9.8% melt due to conservative financial moves by families (Class of 2024). Actual melt was 10.5% that year.
 - Class of 2025 – WPI projected 9% melt, but only 5.2%. Potentially due to families' preferences to not accept waitlist positions elsewhere considering uncertainty
 - Several financially stable institutions with endowments over enrolled, less financially stable institutions had lower enrollments
- g. Currently, ~1000 high school visits in 8-week period are planned (domestic and international). Roughly half of them is planned to be in-person. Admissions / Enrollment Management Office is focused on getting a more accurate summer melt projection this year. Their goal is to provide updates during the summer to facilitate planning by the academic programs One approach is to use the waitlist to fine-tune enrollment to get to the set goal
- h. Impacts of test-blind policy or no application fees will be seen incrementally over time. This will be the first year we see the impact of test-blind. AP underscored the importance of communicating the meaning of 'test-blind' vs 'test-optional' to high school counselors, as confusion regarding the difference between the two persists WPI is really a front runner in test-blind policy. We are #70 in US of adopting test-blind out of 84. Pre covid, there was only 1.

3. Discussion:

a. Titova asked about the relatively small increases in fraction of Pell-eligible students (10 to 11%) and of minority students (13 to 14%). A. Palumbo hopes test-blind policy will change landscape of types of students who apply, not necessarily increase in total student numbers. WPI continues to struggle with pipeline issues for recruiting a diverse class and providing access to affordable education. Specifically, many students in the demographics that we want to attract do not meet academic standards. In many cases this is due to schools not offering calculus and other higher-level courses. WPI needs to create opportunities in the pipeline. To address this issue, WPI is piloting Pre-Calculus Bridge program, where students are admitted conditionally and offered free pre-calculus course in partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College. WPI is ~\$16k more expensive than private institutions. Working on offering increased discount tuition rates to students.

b. Reilly (Advising) brought up the issue of unnecessary additional stress for incoming students causes by waitlists in courses, and the need for early communication from Admissions to Advising, Registrar's office and academic programs to plan for additional sections if needed to alleviate this issue. AP acknowledged that this is needed. Agreement was reached that Admissions will meet with CAO in early May to assess the incoming data and communicate to the departments most affected the need to increase (or decrease) section sizes in their planning for the next AY.

c. Support for accepted students after May 1 is limited. A. Palumbo also highlighted the urgent need of providing more resources to Advising and Registrar's office to facilitate onboarding and help with course registration. WPI has some of the worst track records in this regard where accepted students do not have clear communication with WPI over the summer. Accepted students need one point of contact to answer their questions. Other institutions have a Dean of First Year Students or a similar position.

d. S. Miles (Registrar) supported early sharing of information with departments as it takes time for them to react to changes in the class size.

e. Our melt was less than other schools. We were the only highly selective school that was test-blind.

f. A. Gericke voiced concerns about COG's insistence that A. Palumbo also delivers a report to COG even though CAO had informed COG that it is according to the faculty handbook the responsibility of CAO to monitor admissions and financial aid policies. Gericke noted that this is an unfortunate disregard of WPI's governance structure.

4. Summary: While predicting the class size is challenging, better communication between Admissions/Enrollment and academic programs is necessary. CAO will invite A. Palumbo back in early May to discuss projected class size and other metrics based on early engagement with applicants.

Meeting concluded at 11:49AM

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Z. Musacchio (Secretary CAO)