

Committee on Advising and Student Life
Annual Report
Academic Year 2023-24
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Members

Chaz Aguiar (undergraduate)

Francesca Bernardi (MA)

Daniel DiMassa (HUA, Chair)

Jim Doyle (SSPS, Secretary)

Miguel Duran (undergraduate)

Adish Jain (graduate)

Rudra Kafle (PH)

Arnold Lane (ODIME, standing guest)

Jane Li (RBE)

Mia Mercado (undergraduate)

Emily Perlow (Dean of Students, ex-officio)

Adam Powell (ME)

Stephen Price (undergraduate)

Paul Reilly (OAA, ex-officio)

Sarah Stanlick (DIGS, Provost's Representative)

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

The committee met ten times during the 2023-2024 academic year to address the following areas:

1. Academic Advising.

- a. CASL coordinated with multiple stakeholders on campus to plan and deliver WPI's second annual Just-in-Time Advising Training session on February 7, 2024. In addition to the plenary session on academic advising, CASL was supported by Crystal Brown (SSPS), Amy Curran (OAS), and Dina Rassias (MA) in organizing breakout sessions on The Hidden Curriculum; Supporting Students

with Learning Differences; and Advising Students Through the Calculus Sequence.

- b. Following up on the outcome of a survey of graduate program coordinators from 2023-2024, CASL liaised throughout the year with representatives of Graduate Studies as well as the coordinators of graduate programs at WPI to understand advising discrepancies that exist among graduate programs. CASL delivered recommendations to graduate program coordinators and expressed an interest in continuing to work with representatives of Graduate Studies to eliminate such discrepancies.
- c. Prof. DiMassa (Arts & Sciences) and Prof. Powell (Engineering) volunteered to review nominations and make recommendations for the annual Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Academic Advising.

2. Student Life.

- a. CASL reviewed data from WPI's most recent Enrolled Student Survey and discussed areas of potential improvement. Among these was a more pronounced level of dissatisfaction among WPI's transgender students. To that end, CASL invited Profs. Lindsay Davis and Rebecca Moody to discuss the findings of their research on inclusive pedagogy. CASL considered ways to disseminate their findings, including making recommendations to department heads to hold departmental meetings on practices of inclusive pedagogy.
- b. CASL liaised extensively with the newly formed Campus Wellness Coalition to keep apprised of university initiatives toward health and wellness. Prof. DiMassa served as CASL's representative to the Coalition and presented to the Coalition on areas within the curriculum where wellness initiatives may already be embedded, or could be in the future. CASL invited and spoke with leaders of the Coalition about current and future plans for supporting wellness on campus.
- c. CASL remained in communication with Stan Horton, Title IX Coordinator, to be involved in the development of an upcoming campus climate survey.
- d. In the wake of discussions of violence in Gaza, and concerns among WPI students that their ability to speak out on the topic was being impeded, CASL discussed WPI's use of a Bias Reporting System and whether it might be abused.

3. Committee Administration.

- a. Reviewed and approved the current charge of the committee upon request of the Secretary of the Faculty.
- b. Evaluated the prospect of adding a new representative from Graduate Studies.
- c. Coordinated with committee members and newly elected committee members to elect a new chair for the next academic year (2024-2025).

Invited guests

- a. Rory Flinn, Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Greg Cesar, Senior Associate Director of Graduate Studies, discussed the need for more systematic advising practices, especially among incoming graduate students.
- b. Rachel LeBlanc, Associate Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, along with committee member Emily Perlow, Dean of Students, provided a presentation on data from WPI's Enrolled Student Survey.

- c. Chrys Demetry, Director of the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center, and Tally Reeverts, Senior Assistant Director of OAA, coordinated in the planning of the annual Just-in-Time Advising Training Session.
- d. Profs. Lindsay Davis and Rebecca Moody, co-founders and co-directors of WPI's program in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, discussed the findings of their research on inclusive pedagogy.
- e. Paula Fitzpatrick, Director of the Center for Well-Being, and Charles Morse, Dean of Student Wellness, reported on the work of the Campus Wellness Coalition and the Center for Well-Being, while updating CASL on the status of WPI's prospective adoption of the Okanagan Charter.
- f. Tony Laing, Assistant Vice President for DEIB, and Meredith Merchant, Assistant Director of Facilities and Recreation, discussed their work on the Bias Response Team and the procedures for filing a Bias Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMITTEE ACTION IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2024-2025

- Select a CASL member to represent the committee on the Campus Wellness Coalition. Liaise with the Campus Wellness Coalition and document the impact of WPI's prospective adoption of the Okanagan Charter.
- Work with the team of the Morgan Center to continue the annual "Just-in-Time" Advising Training. Consider involving the Career Development Center and finding additional opportunities for providing university-wide guidance on advising. Consider incorporating the research of Profs. Lindsay Davis and Rebecca Moody, either in this session or in a separate session for faculty.
- Continue with initiatives to improve graduate student advising at WPI, especially in communication with students between the time of matriculation and the start of the first semester. Liaise with Greg Cesar (Senior Associate Director, Graduate Studies), Rory Flinn (Assistant Dean, Graduate Studies), Melissa Terrio (Assistant Dean, Academic Services, Graduate Admissions), and coordinators of graduate programs.
- Follow up on data from the Enrolled Student Survey that revealed lower satisfaction at WPI among transgender and international students. Continue to identify ways that faculty might respond to this discrepancy.
- Read the forthcoming report of WPI's Bias Response Team and continue to ensure that the Bias Reporting System is not being used to marginalize students of particular groups, positions, or identities.
- Office of Equal Opportunity and Outreach: CASL should engage with reviewing the questions for the Title IX climate survey and provide feedback on supplementing the questions, where possible.
- CASL should discuss how to make advising a more legible piece of tenure and promotion dossiers.

Academic Year 2024-2025 Membership transition

Profs. Francesca Bernardi and Adam Powell completed their 3-year CASL terms (2021-2024). Prof. DiMassa will step off the committee for sabbatical. Profs. Melissa Kagen, Ingrid Matos-Nin, and Erin Ottmar were elected to serve 3-year terms on CASL (2024-2027). SGA will appoint new student members.

Academic Year 2024-2025 Officers

The newly elected committee nominated and voted Jim Doyle into the role of committee chair. CASL will identify a secretary in its first meeting of AY2024-25.