

Committee on Advising and Student Life (CASL)

Annual Report for the 2021-2022 Academic Year

Membership

Committee members included Prof. Scott Barton, Prof. Francesca Bernardi, Prof. Jeannine M. Coburn, Prof. Adam Powell, Prof. Pádraig Ó Catháin (through December 2021), Prof. Edward Gutierrez, Greg Snoddy (Assistant VP and Dean of Students, ex-officio), Prof. Arne Gericke (Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Provost Representative), Paul Reilly (Executive Director of Academic Affairs, ex-officio), Michael MacGregor (undergraduate student, SGA appointment), Kim Huang (undergraduate student, SGA appointment), Meha Mohapatra (graduate student, GSG appointment). Mia-Kay Fuller and Rachel Heard from the Office of Multicultural Affairs also joined meetings as invited guests.

Officers

Scott Barton served as chair; Francesca Bernardi served as secretary.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

The committee met thirteen times during the 2021-2022 academic year to address the following areas:

1. **Mental Health and Well Being.** The work of the committee predominantly focused on the mental health and well-being (MHWB) crisis that our community faced in the 2021-2022 academic year. CASL
 - a. Organized and lead a special faculty meeting focused on MHWB, which occurred on September 30, 2021.
 - b. Collected, organized, and summarized feedback from faculty via the special faculty meeting, department meetings, a survey (which CASL designed and distributed), and personal correspondence. The summary document was shared with the MHWB task force.
 - c. Participated on the MHWB task force and the Mental Health Implementation Team (MHIT); coordinated the goals and activities of CASL with those groups.
 - d. Initiated conversations with the administration about the MHWB external review process and how CASL and faculty could be involved.
 - e. Reviewed the recommendations of the MHWB task force report and the summary from Chrys Demetry (co-chair of the Academics subcommittee) to identify action items for CASL to engage with, which include
 - i. proactively teaching academic success skills and self-care in offerings for newly enrolled students. Develop (with marketing / communications) and implement communications plan for students, faculty, and staff with the rationale for 7-week terms and reason for student effort-hour expectations, data, and conditions for balance, success, and well-being. Members of CASL collaborated with marketing / communications and The Office of the Dean of students to make a resource that introduces students to the culture of WPI. Emily Perlow

has been working with students to develop a Wiki that contains such information, which is still in process. CASL thinks that sample student schedules would be useful to help give students a sense of how others balance their various obligations.

- ii. Improve academic advising/mentorship at the department level by formally defining the roles and responsibilities for high quality academic advising and acting on the recommendations of the Task Force on Academic Advising (2017) to create departmental plans for academic advising and support for advisors. CASL reviewed the report and determined that more specific definitions for Professional and Faculty Advising, aligned with standards in the field, are needed. The committee worked to develop those definitions, which will be distributed to the faculty next academic year.
 - iii. Increase advisor accountability by making advising a more meaningful part of the criteria used in tenure and promotion cases. A rubric to help departments assess advising would also be helpful. The committee started to develop such a rubric based on the best practices used at other institutions.
 - iv. Make a concise guide that departments can use to structure and evaluate their advising activities. CASL surveyed departments to learn more about their current advising practices. The committee reviewed, organized and summarized the responses in the form of a 1-page document that will be shared with departments before the beginning of AY 2022-2023.
 - v. Create a centralized domain in Workday where graduate and undergraduate students can look up their network of support. This was discussed with the MHWB technology subcommittee, the Office of the Dean of Students, and ITS. Such information currently exists on Workday, but there are issues concerning who should be included in this network and how the information would be updated. This remains a work in progress.
 - f. Discussed the recommendations to add activities to Academic Advising Day in support of mental health.
 - g. Collaborated with the Department of Physical Education about renaming the “PE Requirement” to the “Wellness Requirement.” Discussed development of curriculum in coordination with this change and in particular talked about the potential for wellness topics to be addressed in 1000-level courses directed at first year students. The idea of a connection between the Insight program and Wellness / PE credit was introduced.
2. **Hazing and Title IX.** Concerns about student hazing and Title IX incidents were raised to CASL. The committee recognized the many resources available to our students regarding these issues but was concerned that students might not always be clear about who to talk to and what service each entity/office provides. The committee felt a need for more transparency and communication involving Title IX issues. Ideas included providing broad and regular communications (e.g., posters around campus, orientations, a 1-page summary) that describe the process for reporting incidents, the roles and responsibilities of relevant offices, where those offices are located physically, and online reporting systems. Representatives from the

Student Activities and Title IX Offices attended a committee meeting to discuss the many ways in which the University communicates and responds to these concerns (see minutes from Meeting #6 for details). After a follow-up meeting with the Title IX office later in the year, action items were identified, which are detailed in the “Recommendations” section below.

3. Academic Advising

- a. Addressed the impact of academic holds on students’ ability to register for classes in the Spring of 2022. Suggested changes to the process included placing holds significantly before or after registration dates so such conflicts could be avoided in the future. 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 are also working to make holds more apparent to students.
 - b. Suggested that course schedules either need to be completed before Academic Advising Day or the latter needs to be moved later in the schedule.
 - c. CASL discussed identifying Workday capabilities that are useful for academic advising and circulate to faculty annually.
4. **Membership.** CASL sought to broaden the perspectives represented in our group meetings and thus invited members of the Office of Multicultural Affairs to join us, which they did throughout the year.
 5. **Committee Administration.** All committee files (agendas, minutes, notes, resources, etc.) were consolidated and moved to a SharePoint site to improve access, transparency, and continuity for the committee members.
 6. **Board of Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Academic Advising.** Prof. Bernardi (Arts & Sciences) and Prof. Coburn (Engineering) volunteered to serve on the award committee to review nominations and make recommendations for the award.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMITTEE ACTION IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023

1. Distribute the following to faculty and Departments at the beginning of AY 2022-2023
 - a. Definitions of roles and responsibilities for Professional and Faculty academic advisors
 - b. 1-page guide for departments to structure and evaluate advising activities
2. Develop and distribute
 - a. Surveys to students and faculty about current advising relationships and practices
 - b. Rubrics to help departments assess faculty advising
3. Continue to work with Emily Perlow and the Office of the Dean of Students to develop a resource for students that introduces them to the culture of WPI, including effort-hour expectations, balance between obligations, time management, etc.
4. Discuss advising as criteria for tenure and promotion with appropriate faculty governance committees.
5. Title IX:

- a. Provide feedback on new marketing and informational materials regarding Title IX reporting and resources on campus.
- b. A representative from CASL should be involved in the design, administration, data collection, analysis, and reporting of the upcoming Massachusetts-mandated campus climate survey.

Scott Barton

Chair of CASL 2021-2022