

The VP Is In

Have something to say? Share your questions, concerns, thoughts, and ideas with Vice President for Student Affairs Edward Spencer at The VP Is In open sessions, held in partnership with the Student Government Association. Visit the SGA website for information about upcoming sessions.

Wondering what other students have to say about the university? See what happened at past sessions below:

October 18, 2011

On October 18, 2011 we held the second "The VP is In" session of the semester, this time at the Graduate Life Center rather than in the Student Government Association office. Let me share with you some brief notes on what was on the minds of our students.

A representative from the Entrepreneur Club came to ask about obtaining funding for the club. We determined that this is a Registered Student Organization and I suggested that the club could apply for funding through the RSO Budget Board process. I directed the group to the Student Activities Office in Squires and to Steve Burrell, in particular, who can give the group specific information about the funding options available to them. This led to some further discussion about how our student organizations are funded. I explained that there are three basic categories of student organizations. The groups called University Student Life Programs (USLPs) obtain their funding through University departments since their mission is so tied to a department. The second group, the Chartered Student Organizations (CSOs), which are basically the organizations represented on the Commission on Student Affairs, receive their funding through the Student Budget Board (SBB) annual funding allocation process. Registered Student Organizations (RSOs), which encompass most of our organizations and include individual fraternity and sorority chapters, are eligible for funding through the RSO Budget Board.

A question was raised about what is happening with the membership discussions in the Commission on Student Affairs. The student organizations represented on the Commission on Student Affairs have traditionally been our Chartered Student Organizations since the new classification of student organizations system went into effect back in the mid 90's. The challenge that has developed over the years is that more and more Registered Student Organizations have become Chartered Student Organizations and have, by practice, been given a seat on the Commission on Student Affairs. This has had two consequences: the size of the Commission has grown and grown and we have set ourselves up with a perpetual problem of a Commission that continues to grow in membership and is already by far the largest of the eight commissions of the Governance system. The second consequence is that the proportionate representation of graduate students has declined over the years since nearly all of the RSOs that have become CSOs have been undergraduate organizations. So, the current discussions on future CSA membership are designed to come up with proposals to: 1) reduce the size of the commission, and 2) allocate student seats appropriately between undergraduate and graduate students.

Next there was a discussion about new student-orientated newspapers. There was concern expressed by all about the nature of "The Black Sheep" which describes itself as "a college newspaper that is actually about college." Students present were not supportive of the orientation and content of that newspaper. It was also noted that another newspaper, "The Odyssey," is scheduled to begin appearing and to be focused on the Greek community and the positive accomplishments of that community.

Now that my retirement in the summer of 2012 has been announced, students were interested in how a successor would be chosen. I explained that the Provost is in the process of organizing a search committee that will work with him on this process; it is also likely that a search firm will be engaged to assist with the process. We anticipate that the committee will be appointed shortly and begin its work, that advertisements about the position will begin appearing right after the winter break, that interviews will be held on campus (probably in mid-spring semester) and that hopefully a new person will be identified by the end of the academic year. Although I have targeted June 30 as the effective date of my resignation, I have indicated to the Provost that I can be flexible and stay a little longer if the new person is unable to be in place by July 1.

We had a discussion about all of our various dining options and how students might provide more input into the options and changes of options. I strongly suggested that students fill out the comment cards that are available in the dining halls and submit their ideas. These comments are taken very seriously by the Dining Services management staff.

One student who had heard discussions about the drafting of the University's Strategic Plan for 2012-2018 asked about whether we are projecting a growth in enrollment. I indicated that my understanding is that we might project a very minimal growth in undergraduate students, but there is some strong support developing for increasing graduate enrollment by about 1,000 and with the emphasis being on growth in the STEMH areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Health Sciences). All of the students present were opposed to such growth until such time as we can fund needed positions and facilities that are currently inadequate. Graduate students reported having to teach larger and larger classes, students felt that they are competing for too few opportunities for too many people, office and lab spaces are lacking, classes for undergraduates are too large, etc. So the basic message from these students was that we need to solve our current deficits in space and resources (human and financial) before we begin expanding enrollment further. Additionally, their feeling was that if and when we expand graduate enrollment, the growth should not be limited to the STEMH areas.

During the last part of the meeting we talked about the future of housing for fraternities and sororities on the campus. I explained that the Phase IV project (a partnership arrangement between a House Corporation and the University) is underway with the construction of the Sigma Phi Epsilon house. We believe that over a period of time, more groups will choose to enter into such a partnership arrangement and obtain houses in the Phase IV tract. These groups may be currently living off campus as well as on campus. It is our expectation that when these groups vacate their current houses, that will allow smaller and newer groups to take over their house so that we will have a domino-like process that will offer new houses for larger more established chapters and free up current houses for whom the Phase IV project is not yet realistic.

I hope that you will join us for the next "The VP is In" session which will be held on November 30, 2011, from 3:30 p.m., - 5:00 p.m., in Deet's Place. See you around the campus!

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