

Student Affairs Committee's 2022-23 report

This report is based on meeting minutes recorded during the Fall and Spring semesters of the 2022-23 academic year. The report begins with a plan that this committee developed during the Fall 2022 semester. Then, the focus shifts to some of the work that the committee engaged in these past two academic semesters. This report ends with this committee's vision for how it hopes to continue working to improve the lives of our students at Stockton University.

A. Fall 2022

The committee met three times during the fall semester of 2022. The first semester was spent on the (re)formulation of the committee's purpose and role—this led to the deletion of the term “discipline” from the Senate Standing Committees' page because it didn't reflect how this committee understands its mission and “responsibility for all matters of student life.” Reflections and discussions around this committee's purpose and role resulted in a [list of immediate and longer-term tasks or projects](#) that we believed could materially improve student life. Below are a few tasks and projects that committee members deemed in need of immediate attention:

- [Board of Trustees Fellowships for Distinguished Students](#) (BOT Fellowship) application process: We decided to reach out to Dr. Ana Edmondson who oversaw The BOT Fellowship program and asked her to brief the committee on the fellowship's application process. Some of our concerns were around potential barriers that are preventing or discouraging some groups of students from applying. Other concerns were around the existence of data on applicants who typically apply for and/or receive this fellowship—we were interested in reviewing data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and/or gender on applicants and recipients. Dr. Ana Edmondson did agree to brief the committee on the BOT Fellowship application process; she attended our December meeting. Below are a few takeaways from Dr. Ana Edmondson's presentation and discussions surrounding her presentation:
 - Dr. Edmondson conceded that the plan is to “enhance the branding” of the fellowship, and to review some of the application requirements (e.g. why 3 letters of recommendation?).

- This year, most applicants were seniors, White, and submitted science-based projects.
- A former BOT fellow suggested that the “rigor” and arduous process tend to discourage students, especially first-year students (and Sophomores) to apply—the committee offered some recommendations on how to better support students with the application process.
- Dissemination of information about resources on campus: The other project that this committee decided to work on is developing a better understanding of how information about resources on campus (e.g. Food Pantry; financial assistance) get disseminated. One question that came up is: why is the university seemingly so much more effective at reaching students when they owe money than it is at connecting them to resources?
 - one action item out of this discussion was to reach out to someone from IT—maybe Scott Hudson—and asked that they brief the committee on the university’s current/future plans for disseminating information to students.
 - another action item was to reach out to someone from the CARE’s office.
- CARE Referrals: We also decided to look into the CARE office’s work. This was the committee’s first step into deepening its understanding of how the university connects students to services and resources on campus.

The list of tasks and projects that we developed not only helped to concretize the committee’s purpose and role, it also provided us with clear goals for upcoming semesters.

B. Spring 2023

This past semester the committee also met three times. The initial plan was to continue working on some of the tasks/projects that we came up the previous semester (e.g. Dissemination of information about resources on campus). However, considerable time was also devoted to better understanding the university’s policy and procedures surrounding “hate speech” or/and discriminatory behaviors as a result of some racist/antisemitic instances brought up to the committee’s attention. Below are just a few important things that happened this past semester:

- Discussions of the university’s response to Hate Speech/Bias on campus: one of our committee members shared some disturbing instances of hate (antisemitic and racist) speech/discriminatory behaviors on campus that some students had experienced. The question before the committee was: what does the university have in place to protect students against hate speech and discriminatory behaviors? We also wanted to better understand the university’s reporting system—how can students, staff, and faculty report being or feeling discriminated against? We agreed that we needed to invite Dr. Valerie Hayes or someone from her office to brief us on the university’s policy and procedures for dealing with hate speech and discriminatory behavior.
- Presentation on CARE referrals (particular focus on hate speech): Marques Johnson, Associate Dean of Students, and Seth Richards, Associate Director of Office of Student Conduct, gave a brief presentation on the referral process for CARE and how referrals are turned into support for students. Below is a list of questions/concerns that they addressed in their presentation:
 - a seeming conflict between protecting First Amendment activity (free speech) and protecting against hate speech which also interferes with our students’ ability to succeed (an equal protection issue).
 - How can we make it known to students who experience harassment that the faculty believes them, takes them seriously, and will do what we can to protect them?
 - What’s the threshold for sanctionable behavior, and how do we make sure that the consequences are proportional to the severity of the incident?
 - How can we assist students who experience hate off campus?
 - How can we make it as easy as possible for students to report incidents of hate? As easy as finding their tuition bill?
 - There was a sense that, even though Marquese, Seth, and Haley provided excellent information on the work they do and the resources available on campus/online, Dr. Valerie Hayes’ office—or Tammy Saunders—was the place that this committee needs to reach out to explore some of its initial concerns surrounding hate speech and free speech further.

- Violation HIPAA Vs. Attendance Policy: Another issue that came up this past semester was the fact that many faculty members may not realize that it's a violation of HIPAA to require or ask students to submit doctor's notes or other medical documentations to justify an absence/absences. Discussions focused on the tension or conflict between some faculty's attendance policy and students' rights to privacy.
 - What came up is a need to inform as many faculty (and perhaps staff) as possible that they cannot require students to share medical records or information—we thought of the Faculty Senate Meeting as a forum to begin sharing this information and discuss the legal and ethical issues surrounding some attendance policies.
 - We plan to develop a list of recommendations surrounding attendance policy that can (hopefully) help faculty/staff come up with better ways to deal with absences without having to infringe upon HIPAA.

We deviated a bit from the goals and plan articulated the previous fall semester—it's important to note that we're determined to continue working on the tasks and projects that we came up with last fall (e.g. understanding and working to improve the university's dissemination of information). However, this past semester, we had to refocus efforts on issues that demanded our immediate attention (e.g. Hate Vs. Free speech) and that we also intend to add to the list of tasks to work on this upcoming academic year.

C. Next Steps

In addition to our commitment to follow through on the tasks/projects discussed earlier in this document, we also want to develop more efficient ways to work on and make progress on those tasks—one possible approach is to create subcommittee groups and assign them to specific tasks/projects. This committee is made up of members from various academic schools, programs, and offices. We intend on getting better at tapping into the wealth of expertise and diversity of experiences among members of this committee to continue working to improve “all matters of student life.”