

**University Council Committee on Academic and Related Affairs  
April 1, 2009**

**Chair:** Peter Decherney

**Staff Liaison:** Karen Lawrence

**Committee members:**

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**Charge #1: Discuss the global engagement initiatives of the university with particular attention to issues such as: central funding and coordination for these initiatives, funding for students to study abroad, need-blind admissions for international students, and the adequacy of current resources for international students.**

In the past, the Committee on Academic and Related Affairs has had concerns about the university's (as opposed to individual school's) role in global-engagement initiatives. For example, the university has seemed unwilling to develop or continue to support certain international programs, such as the French Institute for Culture and Technology or the European Union Centers of Excellence, which received funding from outside Penn and would have been in keeping with the goals of an international university.

In discussing our charge with Gayle Christensen, Advisor to the Provost and the President on International Initiatives, it appears that the central administration at Penn has embarked on a number of university-wide global initiatives. Examples of these include the Distinguished International Scholars Initiative and the Provost's and the President's effort to select international partners for Penn among outstanding universities and institutions around the world, beginning with Tsinghua University in Beijing, a university with ties to the Chinese Academy of Science.

Other efforts under consideration include the extension of need-blind admission to international students, fund-raising for international student aid through Penn's current campaign, and the Hewlett Award for overseas internships. Of course, the current international economic crisis may have a bearing on any immediate movement towards these goals.

We discussed the Penn study abroad program with Geoffrey Gee, Director of Study Abroad Programs, Office of International Programs. He indicated that over the past five years, the number of Penn undergraduates who studied abroad through this program has averaged 630 annually. We were glad to learn that students who are eligible to receive financial aid, including Penn grants, may apply their aid package to study on a Penn Abroad program. 34% of participants in 2008-09 received some form of financial aid. Concerns were articulated by some Committee members as to the adequacy of this amount and whether the savings due to the generally lower tuition of the institutions abroad as compared to Penn should be passed on to the Penn students.

Our concerns regarding the adequacy of the current resources for international students were addressed to Rodolfo Altamirano, Director, International Student and Scholar Services, Office of International Programs (OIP). He indicated that the existence,

quality, and the quantity of resources for international students varied by their nature. He divided them in four categories:

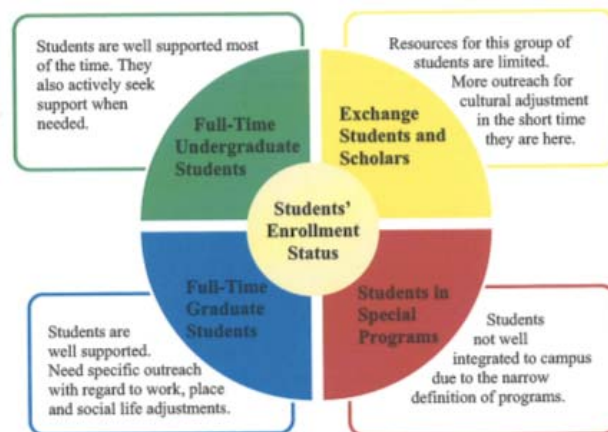
(1) Resources for visas and immigration: they are centrally located in one place and generally well supported.

(2) Resources for academic support: they are available, however, most of the resource providers are not trained to work specifically with international students. Staff lacks training in intercultural competence and cultural-based skills to work with them. International students need more resources for internships and job searches.

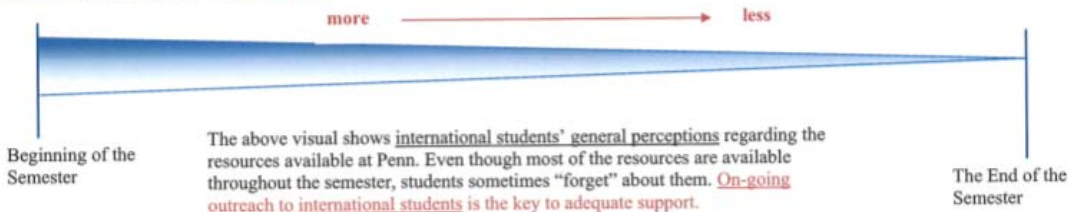
(3) Resources for campus life and culture: resources are very scattered. International students may not always be aware of all that is available to them. Resources to allow them to develop intercultural communication skills are minimal.

(4) Resources for Student Finance: Limited funding and scholarship are available for international students from the university. Most funding come from the individual schools and is directed at the graduate level.

We were impressed with Mr. Altamirano thoughtful and innovative responses to the needs of international students at Penn. We have attached below a chart prepared by Mr. Altamirano, and we recommend continued support for his initiatives.



#### C. Timeline for Resources Available



## **Recommendations**

- 1) We recommend movement towards need-blind admission for international undergraduate students.
- 2) We encourage continued support for international programs from the central administration.

### **Charge #2: Discuss Penn's use of educational technology and how it compares to its peer institutions in the adoption of educational technology.**

On November 10, the committee met with Ira Winston, IT Executive Director for SAS, SEAS, and Design, John MacDermott, IT Director for SAS-Computing, and Anu Vedantham, director of the Weigle Information Commons of the Van Pelt Library to discuss Penn's use of educational and information technology.

The panel explained that Penn has a decentralized technology staff. As a result there is only limited collaboration among schools, and the library has taken over the job of implementing and supporting many university-wide projects such as Blackboard.

Blackboard remains the primary tool used in most courses at Penn. Only Wharton, which has its own proprietary courseware system, does not use Blackboard. Both faculty and students have become accustomed to Blackboard, and it seems to serve many needs. There is, however, an open source alternative, Sakai, which has been adopted for some courses and committees at Penn. Sakai has some significant advantages over Blackboard. It is free, feature rich, and more user-friendly than Blackboard. Because Sakai is an open source project, however, it would require more technical support from Penn's IT staff than Blackboard, which comes with a support contract. The costs in time and effort to switch entirely to Sakai might be too high. But the committee feels that it would be beneficial to move more courses to Sakai, both because it seems to be a superior product and because it is important to support university-led open source projects.

Ira Winston explained that the schools of Arts and Sciences and Engineering have adopted a rule of placing the majority of their effort into supporting the 80% of faculty that account for the average technology users. Fewer resources and less time is devoted to the 10% of advanced users at the top and the 10% of faculty whose use of educational technology is minimal. This seems to be entirely appropriate. But according to Winston's own account, Penn pays less attention to the 10% of advanced users and early adopters than peer institutions. The committee would just note the importance of keeping up with advances in educational technology, and encourage Penn's schools to create more opportunities for experimental programs. The School of Arts and Sciences does support some experimental programs through its course technology grants program, which seems to be a good model.

One recent project that has begun to pick up momentum is the podcasting of courses so that students can review lectures. This is already a common practice at many other universities and at Penn's medical school. Select courses in other schools at Penn have begun to podcast lectures, and the service gets very high ratings from students. Podcasting also seems to result in better performance on exams. A plan to outfit central-

pool classrooms with podcasting equipment has recently been delayed, because of financial concerns. The committee hopes that the project will not be forgotten when funds become available again.

The Weigle Information Commons of the Van Pelt library has become a central hub on campus for educational technology. It provides spaces for students and faculty to use multimedia technology, to prepare coursework, and to work on extracurricular projects. The commons also provides training in the use of hardware, software, and research methods. Hundreds of students use the commons every semester to complete multimedia assignments for coursework. Uses range from creating mashup videos to designing posters to preparing slide presentations. One of most important elements of the commons is that it allows faculty to integrate technology-dependent coursework into their courses without having to train students or support the technology themselves. The commons has been a great asset to Penn, and the committee would love to see more faculty take advantage of it. One interesting question for the future of the commons is how much effort must be put into updating and expanding its technological capabilities and how much effort will be put into becoming a training area and expect that many students have significant computing power themselves.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) The committee recommends increased support for open source software, including Sakai.
- 2) The committee recommends that more resource be devoted to experimentation with new educational technology.
- 3) The committee hopes that the more classrooms will be equipped with podcasting equipment when resources become available.

### **Charge #3 Revisit some of the concerns regarding the consistency of communication of ethical standards across the university and follow up on suggestions put forth during the 2007-2008 academic year.**

The committee received a visit on December 15, 2008 from Susan Herron, Director, Office of Student Conduct, Elizabeth Scheyder, Instructional Technology & Pedagogy Support Services for Faculty, SAS, Marjorie Hassen, Publication Services, Van Pelt Library.

Discussion focused on the use or potential for use of specialized software for detection of plagiarized text. SafeAssign and Turn It In are the primary software programs available. Blackboard has purchased SafeAssign and, since August 2008, it has been incorporated into the upgraded Blackboard software. Although it is currently not available for use, Penn hopes to turn the feature on in the Fall 2009 semester.

Students' papers can be checked against the SafeAssign database, and against other Penn students' papers, but the committee expressed the wish not to allow our students' papers to be added to the SafeAssign database, which is available to other

participating universities. The SafeAssign server is offsite and needs to be made compliant with our privacy policy. It may be possible to purge personal information from papers, to anonymize them, but many faculty are concerned about outsourcing to a commercial company and abrogating control over the process. SafeAssign is described by the Blackboard administration as follows:

[SafeAssign is] a tool that compares submitted assignments against a set of academic essays to identify areas of overlap. SafeAssign can be used to prevent plagiarism and to create opportunities to help Students identify how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase.

SafeAssign draws from several different databases: the Internet, ProQuest, ABI/Inform database, institutional document archives, and the Global Reference Database, which includes content submitted into SafeAssign from Blackboard-powered institutions. ...SafeAssign content must be created itself, and ... previously created Assignments cannot be integrated with SafeAssign. Plagiarism detection for computer code is also available, but not as part of SafeAssign.

One concern raised during the meeting had to do with whether faculty would use this facility to any significant degree. As a whole, faculty do not appear to see an increase in plagiarism, which in any case seems to be considered to be a low-level problem. This is also coupled with the more general issues of academic integrity, and to what constitutes plagiarism.

**The Office of Student Conduct** website at Penn has a link to the Pennbook, which in turn lists the Code of Academic Integrity, part B of which defines plagiarism:

*B. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another without specific or proper acknowledgment. Example: copying another person's paper, article, or computer work and submitting it for an assignment, cloning someone else's ideas without attribution, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, etc.*

This implies possible gray areas concerning citation of other work, but lacks depth.

**Penn's plagiarism policy** is expressed in the following terms:

*If you present someone's words, thoughts or data as your own, you are committing plagiarism—you are stealing. The location of the information is irrelevant: when it comes to plagiarism, information from the Internet is equivalent to information from a physical book or journal.*

*To avoid plagiarism you must cite the original author every time you:*

- *Use an author's exact written or spoken words. In this case, you must also identify the words by enclosing them with quotation marks or indenting the quote on both sides of the margin.*

- *Paraphrase someone's written or spoken words*
- *Use facts provided by someone else that are not common knowledge.*
- *Make significant use of someone's ideas or theories.*

*It is also plagiarism to pay a person or Internet service for a paper, hand in someone else's paper as your own, or cut and paste text from the Internet to your paper without citing the source.*

### *Consequences*

*Students caught plagiarizing may face either academic or disciplinary negative consequences. Instructors who determine that a paper includes plagiarized material can take academic measures, such as giving a failing grade for the paper. If the instructor decides that disciplinary measures should be taken, the case will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. If the student is found responsible following formal procedures, the student may face a number of sanctions—including suspension. Whatever the sanction, academic integrity action by the Office of Student Conduct becomes a part of the student's permanent record and may have an adverse impact on future academic and career goals.*

*Penn's disciplinary process is described in The Charter of the University of Pennsylvania Student Disciplinary System.*

The above provides a definition of plagiarism, but appears to stop short of guiding students along an appropriate path through an area where even faculty members are often challenged: How to cite others' work appropriately; How to distinguish between “common knowledge” and “intellectual property”; What to present in a report, which may be under the name of one student but will often incorporate the work of others....

The Office of Student Conduct website posts four links to other universities, which have more extensive documentation on academic integrity issues including plagiarism:

1. <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>
2. <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html>
3. <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~janicke/plagiary.htm>
4. <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/SJA/plagiarism.html#how>

It is clear that the increasing use of web-based resources and other methods for document digitization and information transfer creates more potential opportunities for violation of academic codes of integrity, not limited to the activities of undergraduates. It is recommended that Penn develop its own detailed information resource on plagiarism, at least to the level of the Northwestern document (Link 1 above). This would not only highlight the definition and likely consequences of the activity, but would also provide scholarly advice in some depth. The presence of such a local document would also avoid the inevitable problem with off-campus web-based links, which is that they expire. (Also,

regarding the four links above, links 3 & 4 were in fact dead as of March 26, and link 2 had been redirected.)

The likely impact on students of the implementation of a software approach to course security is unknown. The committee feels that it will be important to advertise to students that Blackboard may be using plagiarism detection software. Most important, in implementing such procedures, faculty will need to weigh the advantages of additional security against the actual risk, which is assessed at no more than a few percent of all students, and the inevitable extra time involved. Also, it is critical not to undermine faculty-student relations by potentially creating an adversarial situation.

Finally, it is recommended that SafeAssign, and its capabilities, be advertised widely to faculty members well in advance of its implementation. At the moment, it can be found via a search of the Penn Website, but even now SafeAssign should probably be listed inside Blackboard as a forthcoming development.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) The committee commends SAS, the library, and the Office of Student Conduct on their oversight of the adoption of plagiarism detection software. We encourage them to continue their efforts to protect student work from ownership and access by third parties and to ensure that the servers and treatment of content meet university privacy standards.
- 2) The committee wants to stress how important it is that faculty and students be made aware of both the existence of the software on Blackboard and its methods of operation.
- 3) On a larger scale, the committee feels strongly that the university needs to better articulate its plagiarism policies and communicate them to both students and faculty.

### **Charge #4: Review and discuss the committee's general charge and identify two or three issues that should be given highest priority for the committee's work in AY 2009-2010.**

- 1) Many universities including Harvard and MIT have adopted Open Access publication policies for their faculty. In addition, recent and pending U.S. legislation addresses the open access requirements for research funded by the National Institute of Health. Should Penn consider an Open Access policy? If so how should it be implemented?
- 2) How effective is the podcasting of course lectures? Does the university need to enhance its facilities for podcasting? Are there best practices to adopt?