APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees Student Life Committee

Date and Time
Tuesday September 19, 2023 at 8:15 AM

Location
Presidents' Hall, Mazzaferro Center, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

Notice of a meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Student Life Committee on Tuesday, September 19, 2023 at 8:15 a.m. in Presidents' Hall, Mazzaferro Center, 291 Highland Ave., Fitchburg, MA 01420

Committee Members Present
A. Turner, C. Stimpson, D. Phillips (remote), D. Tiernan (remote), S. King-Goodwin (remote)

Committee Members Absent
None

Ex Officio Members Present
R. Lapidus

Guests Present
E. Gregoire, F. Barricelli, G. Doiron, G. Doiron, J. Bry, L. Bayless, M. Bruun, M. Lechter, P. Marshall, P. McCafferty, R. Toomey, S. Dodd

I. Opening Items

A. **Record Attendance**

B. **Call the Meeting to Order**

S. King-Goodwin called a meeting of the Student Life Committee of Fitchburg State University to order on Tuesday Sep 19, 2023 at 8:17 AM.

II. Student Life

A. The Student Residential Experience

The President introduced Dr. Laura Bayless, Vice President of Student Affairs and Mr. Matt Lechter, Executive Director Housing and Residential Services. They explained that this presentation is a high-level view using a number of different data collection sources that captured what students are thinking about regarding their residential experience.

L. Bayless provided background on the survey instrument Skyfactor. This is a survey instrument that has been administered around the country for decades. The data that will be discussed today comes from this survey. She next outlined the agenda for the discussion:

1. Goals of the residential experience/Why we want students to live on campus
2. Overview of occupancy
3. What students tell us about living and eating on campus
- Skyfactor nationally benchmarked survey
- Feedback about dining from identity-based student groups and student groups and student government town halls
4. Priorities and actions stemming from student feedback

M. Lechter talked about the goals for the residential experience which included cultivating a sense of belonging and creating a safe and respectful environment to promote academic success. He talked about students being members of the community of Fitchburg State and the City of Fitchburg. This is now their home for the majority of the year.

L. Bayless discussed how the residential experience is linked to the Strategic Plan. What the university is doing is intentional and designed to produce the outcomes desired.

C. Stimpson joined the meeting at 8:27 a.m.

M. Lechter reported on the occupancy usage as of today. He noted that Herlihy Hall and Mara 6 & 7 are offline. The total reported bed count is 1,705. We have converted some of the triple and double rooms to premium singles. Students are appreciative of the larger space.

L. Bayless next discussed the Skyfactor Nationally Benchmarked Survey, “Voice to

Vision Dining Survey," the SGA Town Halls and conversations with identity-based student organizations. She said the university can add specific questions to the national survey and that the intention is to administer this survey every 2-3 years. The university response rates are consistent with our comparison schools. The comparison group consists of schools similar to Fitchburg State that were administering the survey at the same time. The outcomes from the survey questions regarding residence halls, rated satisfaction as low overall. The students reported that they were satisfied with the roommate process and most unhappy with dining services. Compared to the benchmark schools, our students were generally dissatisfied with facilities.

M. Lechter discussed the survey's highs and lows. Students rated roommates, safety, security and a sense of belonging as high. He noted the full-size beds added to the residence halls have been evaluated positively. He talked about the importance of programming in the residence halls which boosts the student's sense of community. He acknowledged that more attention needs to be focused on facilities and dining services. Students are looking for clean facilities, and they feel less stress when they are in a clean environment which adds to their sense of pride. We need to have educational conversations with students regarding the day-to-day work of cleanliness. Many students are not used to doing their own laundry and housekeeping in their private areas. The university staff clean the common areas, and the students are responsible for their personal space.

There was a discussion on cleanliness and building renovations.

L. Bayless discussed the feedback from the dining hall survey. She stated that the dining experience and housing are related. The quality of food, the meal plan and hours of operation were discussed. Students are frustrated with the hours of operation and the food quality. The inability to bring in outside food for events was another issue they were not pleased about.

E. Gregoire asked given the feedback, how will these issues be addressed. L. Bayless responded that some strategies have been implemented such as Starbucks. There was a discussion on various food vendors.

There was a discussion on comparisons with the other schools that participated in the survey and total bed counts as they relate to occupancy capacity. The residence hall designed space and configuration are two different factors. We must pay the debt service regardless of the bed count. Given we have three buildings not being used for student occupancy, our configured percentage is increased to 90% but our reported designed occupancy number to the MSCBA is 62%.

S. King Goodwin left the meeting at 8:57 a.m.

M. Lechter talked about next steps, and focusing on customer service with solution based

thinking. He would like to increase the professional staff activities and make staff more visible to students. Working with Capital Planning and Maintenance to get consistent updates on workorders and increase the cleaning schedule is a priority. He discussed the “First Look Friday” event where new students could see their rooms prior to move in day. It was a highly successful event.

There was a discussion on promoting the cost benefits and social advantages of living on campus.

M. Lechter stated that his team works closely with admissions to coordinate communication and the benefits of living on campus. The partnership between the two offices is strong.

The President agreed with what was said and talked about the increased integration of the admissions process with housing. With the new viewbook and website upgrades, the university believes that we are better equipped to attract students. By providing rough examples of what housing costs off campus as opposed to on campus can sway students to opt in to living in the residence halls. There are a lot of different levers the university is trying to pull.

There was a discussion.

E. Gregoire asked about the community aspect and learning communities in the residence halls.

M. Letcher responded that learning communities are a hot trend in the residence halls. We have those and will be spending more time with our first-year students to better understand what topics and areas of interest there are. He discussed roommate matching and provided a summary on how we might improve the on-campus housing experience.

D. Phillips joined the meeting at 9:15 a.m.

L. Bayless talked about what we need to work on.

D. Tiernan stated the dining hall renovation has been discussed but how do you address the quality of food which seems to be an on-going concern? L. Bayless responded that the issue might be perceptual along with the supply chain issues that have occurred. She stated that she is not sure yet what quality means. For example, is the issue the food itself, or is the food being served not what our increasingly diverse students are used to eating?

J. Bry commented that it’s difficult to understand what students mean by quality as opposed to variety. Better understanding what students are communicating is currently

being explored.

There was a discussion.

III. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:22 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
S. King-Goodwin