A meeting of the Committee on Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life was held via Zoom at 2:15 p.m. on Thursday, November 12, 2020.

The following members were present: Chair David Han, President Eric Barron (Ex Officio), Mark Belkowski (Constituent Representative), Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs Kathy Bieschke, Bryan Culler, Mark Dambly (Ex Officio), Valerie Detwiler, Vice President and General Counsel Steve Dunham, Chris Hoffman, Provost Nicholas Jones, Zachary McKay (Student Representative), Bill Oldsey, Vice President and Dean Robert Pangborn, Jay Paterno, Anne Riley (Emerita Trustee), Vice President of Student Affairs Damon Sims, Laurie Stanell, Steve Wagman, Sean Walsh (Student Representative), Senior Vice President for Research Lora Weiss, Vice Provost for Educational Equity Marcus Whitehurst, and Mary Beth Williams (Faculty Representative).

A quorum was present.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Han at 2:15 p.m. Chair Han called for a motion for the Committee to approve the Minutes of the September 17, 2020 committee meeting. The motion to approve came from Trustee Stanell, and Trustee Oldsey then seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Han welcomed those in attendance to the first meeting of the Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life Committee. The board approved the Bylaws amendment to add Research to the Committee's name and oversight responsibilities to reflect the importance of the University’s $1 billion research enterprise. Chair Han welcomed Dr. Lora Weiss, as a staff liaison to the Committee.

Chair Han noted that Vice Chair Alice Pope was not in attendance due to a death in her family and acknowledged the significant amount of work she contributed to the meeting preparation.

Chair Han stated the meeting topic was to continue an ongoing dialogue from previous AARSL meetings as well as a Board retreat with a generative discussion exploring students’ mental health, wellness, and well-being. He shared that a panel of University service providers from CAPS, University Health Services, Campus Rec, Health Promotions and Wellness and students were in attendance to provide an update and overview of key services and programs that contribute to student wellness and well-being as well as a vision for the future, opportunities and challenges in this arena at Penn State. He introduced Vice President of Student Affairs Damon Sims to open a panel discussion on Student Wellness, Well Being and Mental Health.

Sims stated that the University is poised to be a national leader in the overarching strategy to turn students’ attention and commitment to lifelong health and well-being, impacting their communities and future workplaces. Sims introduced Dr. Ben Locke, Senior Director for CAPS, who shared that his office coordinates a variety of University-wide mental health services that are also distributed to the Commonwealth campuses, and that since spring, and through summer and fall, all services traditionally provided in-person have successfully been transitioned to a remote environment to better serve students’ diverse needs. New services have been added to support students across state lines from tele-coaching to tele-counseling, and tele-psychiatry across the Commonwealth campuses.

Dr. Robin Oliver-Veronesi, Senior Director of University Health Services (UHS), stated UHS has responded to COVID by implementing telemedicine in addition to its face-to-face medical visits. UHS has implemented COVID testing boxes in the semi-outdoor area for students with minimal symptoms, and a newly
constructed negative pressure suite within the health center for COVID testing and evaluation of patients with more concerning symptoms. Visits consist of COVID and non-COVID concerns, urgent and non-urgent medical needs, preventative medical evaluations as well as specialty services, including eating disorder care, transgender care, women’s and men’s health care. Wellness components are evaluated and tailored to student requests, to include depression screening, domestic abuse screening, surgical, sexual, social and family medical history, as well as assessments for sleep habits, stress and anxiety, sexual wellness, substance abuse, exercise frequency and financial insecurity.

Dr. Linda LaSalle, Director for Health Promotions and Wellness (HPW), stated that HPW cultivates a community that supports student success, well-being, and pursuit of lifelong health by delivering individual services, conducting programs and workshops, producing health communication materials, and overseeing peer education initiatives. Students from the peer health education program HealthWorks deliver services including nutrition, alcohol and marijuana education, nicotine cessation, HIV testing, and wellness services covering stress, sleep, healthy relationship, and healthy eating. All of these services have been successfully delivered remotely since March. LaSalle also stated HPW is responsible for implementing Penn State’s Safe and Aware, an online module about alcohol and sexual misconduct that incoming first-year students at all campuses are required to complete. HPW has expanded efforts and developed programs to educate students about lifelong well-being.

Laura Hall, Senior Director for Campus Recreation, stated that Campus Recreation transitioned from Intercollegiate Athletics to Student Affairs six years ago. There are six recreational facilities that offer a wide variety of options, including club sports, outdoor adventures, trips, and clinics. Typical student employment is 1,000 students but they have been able to maintain employment for 600 students through the pandemic by offering both in-person and virtual options for student recreational needs. Hall stated the goal is to serve the students’ broad recreational needs and to act in a preventative manner to avoid needing CAPS’ services.

Dr. Susan McHale, Director of the Social Science Research Institute, stated her research focuses on family's role in adolescent and young adult development, including education achievement, with a special emphasis on issues of gender, race and ethnicity.

Dr. Stephanie Lanza, Professor of Biobehavioral Health and Director of the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center and the Consortium to Combat Substance Abuse, stated her research is heavily focused on young adult wellness and behavior, health behaviors, and in particular substance use. She stated that the University has been supportive of a new research project called Penn State College Relationships and Experiences, Penn State CORE, to study undergraduates across the Commonwealth more holistically.

Shakay Simpson, a junior majoring in Management in Smeal with a minor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, serves as Vice President of Innoblue, a leading entrepreneurship club at University Park, and as a representative on the UP Student Fee Board.

Sydney Statler, a senior majoring in Biobehavioral Health with a minor in Diversity and Inclusion in Health and Human Development, is a member of HealthWorks and a team leader for the Public Health Ambassador Program to support the Mask Up or Pack Up Campaign.

Dr. Andrea Dowhower, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, oversees UHS, CAPS and Campus Recreation and is the principle liaison in Student Affairs to the Commonwealth campus Student Affairs directors.

Generative conversation focused on defining student well-being, educating freshmen students about available resources, addressing challenges in helping students maintain connections and positive attitudes during the pandemic, increasing student awareness of resources, creating a community that makes it easier for students to engage in healthy behaviors, monitoring data on student issues, and considering outcomes such as “What kind of students does Penn State want to produce?” and the delivery vehicles for achieving that outcome. Chair Han concluded the discussion by stating the task now is to figure out how to take these critical elements and deliver them to the population that Penn State serves.
The public session of the Committee on Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life was adjourned at 3:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Stevens
Administrative Coordinator
Office of the Board of Trustees