

Minutes – CPEP Advisory Board Meeting – September 12, 2019

Present: Jan Zeserson (chair), Nancy Koschmann, Andy Borum, Dave Sanders, Katherine McComas (vice provost), Peter Enns, Lauren McLeod, Esta Bigler (via online), Tess Wheelwright (ex officio), Rob Scott (ex officio), Sara Jenab (ex officio scribe)

Absent: Mary Katzenstein, Tom Owens, Darnell Epps, Ifeoma Ajunwa, Judy Appleton, Sheri Johnson

Self-Introductions--because several members have newly joined:

- Peter has taught at Auburn, previously served as CPEP advisory board chair, is associate professor in government, directs the Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell and is Co-Director for the Center of Social Sciences.
- Lauren is a PhD candidate in physics, currently teaches at Five Points and is new to the board
- Dave works as the criminal justice coordinator for Tompkins County and is new to the board. He has taught and also worked as a guard at a juvenile security facility, is the chair of criminal justice alternatives to incarceration (state-mandated board) that unites DA, PD, formerly incarcerated, and others involved in criminal justice work.
- Andy has served on the advisory board for one year, during which he has been key in developing the first computer labs at Cayuga, then at Auburn, and he will help create the computer lab at Five Points. He is a visiting assistant professor in the math department
- Jan has worked with program for ten years as a teacher and advisory board member. She has taught in all the facilities CPEP serves, and is currently teaching the Certificate in the Liberal Arts capstone seminar at Cayuga.
- Nancy has taught with CPEP for more than a decade, at Auburn, Cayuga, and currently at Five Points. She served as an advisory board member in the past.
- Tess is academic director CPEP, before which she was an instructor at Cayuga as well as at Cornell, and has taught at Auburn, Cayuga, and Elmira.
- Esta teaches at the ILR school in NYC, where she directs the labor law program and criminal justice initiative. She is currently teaching legal rights in a correctional facility in NYC. She has lectured at Cayuga and Five Points.
- Rob has been CPEP executive director since 2013.
- Katherine is our vice provost and a strong, committed supporter.

The role of the board (Jan):

- Jan emphasized that we are an *advisory* board. Our role has morphed over time. We review the annual budget and plan, including strategic planning, and we help recruit and interview new staff. Rob and Tess ask for our advice, and we can propose initiatives, but we are not directors; we are advisers. We exist to help innovate by bringing our various talents, perspectives, and experiences to bear.
Ideas that emerged from the board in the past include, among other things, inroads to the AA degree, and periodically brainstorming possibility for BA degree. The board has been

essential in organizing fundraising events and encouraging alumni involvement. The non-credit writing courses and study halls emerged from board members; the student literary journal is edited by a former board member; the CPEJ minor emerged from board discussion and groundwork. Board members speak in on-campus classes and events; we engage in various activities to increase awareness of CPEP on campus; we help recruit faculty to teach. An ongoing discussion has been CPEP's role, if any, in aiding our students upon their release from prison.

Update on the State of the Program (Rob)

- At the next board meeting (Dec), Rob will share the annual report and budget for discussion and approval or suggestions for change.
- Big-picture: the past year was first time CPEP had a budget over a million dollars. We might expect a decrease in the future. We are now in all available prisons in our area. Our project is about commitment to justice, freedom of thought, human rights, access to education, and changing the quality of prison's role in society. In this, we are leaders in our geographic area. We run entirely on grants and gifts so we are focused on sustainability to keep the program running in the future
- There are signals that the state legislature may reinstate eligibility of TAP grants in near future. We should be skeptical but maintain awareness about the topic; it's an exciting possibility. Last year a small advisory board team worked on what CPEP would do if this happened, given that Cornell is stewarding this AA degree program through community colleges. The CCs would be the recipients of TAP money; we have a verbal commitment from the CC that there would be a cost-sharing arrangement set up between Cornell and them.
- This past year: 23 students graduated with an AA degree; we hosted a large consortium last year; got a \$1.7 million grant from Mellon foundation; have a new AA degree with Corning CC; Ithaca college offered its own rostered courses at Cayuga; Two students paroled to complete an AA, and two continued towards a BA.
- BA degree: Tess has been talking with SUNY Cortland to start developing a BA program. We offer 75 courses already, with many at the 300-400 level. Rob suggested to form an advisory board committee to explore this initiative.

Tess seconded the idea that we should discuss this at Dec meeting and form committee. The BA program is clearly the next step. Tess had promising conversation with SUNY Cortland's vice provost of academic affairs who is testing the waters. The VP had questions about why Cornell isn't granting its own degree instead of Cornell professors teaching Cortland courses.

Note: The disappointing update (from Tess a week after our board meeting) on the BA front is that SUNY Cortland's vice provost for academic affairs found those waters cold. After vetting with a couple areas on campus she wrote that it "looks like there is not support for joining in this effort at this time as a degree. This is not a reflection of the program itself, which I have appreciated learning about as we spoke and I looked at materials."

- Peter asked whether a Cornell BA is off the table. Tess would like it on the table but thinks the faculty needs to lead that battle. Rob said it's a strength that we're partnered with SUNY, because their footprint is so similar to the parole of our students, making it easier for our parolees to transfer into a SUNY than to Cornell. It could be that Cornell's role shifts from putting college-in-prison on the map to helping incarcerated people reach their *highest* academic potential (beyond a BA); furthermore we can share the cost when we partner with other schools.
Jan asked if the committee Rob and Tess suggested should be a small group, or should we have a full advisory board discussion. Rob suggested starting with a small group huddle which then can present to the board as a whole. Rob stressed that the aim is to have partnerships with CCs in place before TAP gets reinstated

Reports from ad hoc committees:

- Computer Lab (Andy)
 - We currently have two labs up and running. Cayuga was the first and now holds weekly access to all students, and more access to Certificate students. In January the lab opened at Auburn.
 - At Cayuga, students have access to an offline JSTOR index, which lets them search and request articles; Tess/Sara print and deliver requested articles to the students; also computer access to films for both a film class and a bio class.
 - The computer team is working on bringing in other indexes, e.g., Medline, and maybe Wikipedia or Kahn academy classes in the future; possibly computer programming.
 - At Auburn so far computer access is limited to course materials, including audio and visual files.
 - Biggest issue is technical bugs but those are getting worked out.
 - A computer lab at Five Points is planned for November.
 - A search is on for a computer lab coordinator to take on these responsibilities once we have three separate programs.
 - Rob chimed in to say that we need to advertise this position: this person will coordinate the volunteers and oversee the first research papers coming out of a CPEP facility. It is a part-time, salaried, benefits-eligible position. Rob will send link around to the board for them to advertise.
- Student Voice (Tess)
 - The previous Student Voice Committee members have all rotated off the board
 - Their aim was to devise a way for students to communicate directly with the board. Staff see students all the time; board members do not.
 - The committee came up with a new survey to give out at the end of courses. It is appended to the Minutes of the March 27 advisory board meeting.
 - They aimed to devise an open-ended survey to all students
 - They proposed that Student Voice be a standing committee, not an ad hoc committee
 - CPEP staff has been exploring the idea of a student council, elected by peers, that could write letters to the board.

- Jan mentioned that we need board members to volunteer for this committee.
- Alumni Group (Esta)
 - It is important to keep alumni connected, and alumni is broadly defined: basically anyone who has participated in the program.
 - An alumni group would help graduates (TAs, instructors) stay close as a resource, to network and to help with fundraising
 - Esta had a phone conversation in July (with former TAs Emily and Winnie) where the idea was raised to have a board that would run the alumni association
 - Esta will create a draft of possible bylaws for that board using ILR bylaws as a model.
 - The effort is in the beginning stages, but it will be a robust organization because there is a lot of interest in connecting/ networking and continuing to do the social justice work.
 - Jan said that this plan has been budding for several years and is finally coalescing, so this is a key moment for board members to put in the work. Esta confirmed this IS happening.
- External Advisors (Jan)
 - We know that we have a lot of people on and off campus with advice/ input we could use, including incarceration-related research and alerting us to moments when activism is called for. These people are currently an untapped resource for CPEP.
 - Esta's staff has created, and is now updating, a spreadsheet of everyone at Cornell who does criminal justice research. Jan wants to create a level of advisers, external to the advisory board, called Research and Teaching Associates. This is one way to expand our CPEP academic community.
 - Jan said we are also reconnecting with the Emeritus faculty group (Cindy Robinson, director).
 - Jan wants to form a committee to work on establishing this group of external advisers.
 - Rob mentioned that he and Sara are already working on a bibliography of pieces published by CPEP alumni, another community-building effort.

Open discussion:

- Jan invited comments and feedback from everyone
- Lauren said that at the end of the semester last year at Five Points she had a round table discussion asking for feedback from undergraduate TAs. In that format the more extroverted voices dominated, which might happen in a student council format as well. A student has recently asked her whether we've implemented that feedback; we have not. We need to convince students that we want to hear what they have to say, but also get them to understand how slow things move at a university. Nancy said that, pre-Rob, the former director suggested we do that at the end of classes in Auburn. Two results came out of those feedback sessions at Auburn: a class in agriculture, and business classes.

Nancy thinks student voice is important; her personal strategy is using daily logs in classes where she gets a good suggestions and ideas that she can sometimes implement.

Rob added that there is a paradox in inviting deep critical thinking of prison conditions for people who are incarcerated, because we don't want to raise a bunch of unchangeable issues. We must control the things we ask feedback for to make sure they are doable and have a few concrete examples of things we could do. Broadly, the voice of the men on the inside will work when things are doable. Dave administers performance reviews that work well. He invited us to think about the purpose of any survey we propose—is it to improve the program, just to hear things, or what? His surveys are on a given program itself, and he has to get 80-85% of the people to take the survey to make it informative

- Dave mentioned he is a Cortland CC graduate and has run many alumni events; he has a good connection with the president of Cortland CC and is happy to help with our efforts there.
- Dave wants to know about information sharing. For example, he knows Joe and Jamila's work but wants to know how others at Cornell are doing criminal justice work. His team is going to Georgetown soon to look at social/ structural barriers within Tompkins county and suggest how to improve them, paid for by DCJS. What can we do? Advocate better.
- Tess added other ways board members have helped in the past: recruiting faculty to teach; reading entrance exams, which helps define the next cohort; facilitating meaningful relationships on campus -- one example is that relationships with the library led to our now having an official CPEP librarian liaison [Heather Furnas]. Another connection led to our now having an influential friend in Cornell's Language Lab [Angelika Kraemer].
- Tess brought up the wish for a bridge to Student Disability Services. Dave shared that he is learning disabled and understands this struggle and the advocacy component because he has lived it and advocated for it. He would love to be a part of this effort. Esta said this is a very important issue to her, our instruction should be multi-sensory. Good studies show that a large part of our incarcerated population is learning disabled. They are often angry because they have been failed by the public system. The question of accommodation is one we should address. Tess added that we might need a professional assessment because our students are very aware of any special resources given to people. Tess will reach out to SDS.
- Jan reminded us that CPEP 2nd social events happen the 2nd of every month from 5-7pm, usually at Argos Inn. It's a place where casual, easygoing conversations happen. Thanks to Jan for hosting a family friendly CPEP 2nd on Labor Day
- Jan will send a doodle poll soon to schedule our next board meeting, which by popular demand, will happen between December 2nd – 13th.

- Jan urged members to start thinking about which committee(s) they will work on. Work can start well before our next meeting! She will ask members for agenda items a month in advance of the December meeting.
- Members were unanimous in wanting a contact sheet for all members. Soon to come.
- Jan expressed big thanks to everyone present.
- Meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Submitted by Sara Jenab (CPEP intern), reviewed and revised by board members present at the meeting.