

Draft Minutes –CPEP Advisory Board Meeting – Oct. 15, 2020 – via Zoom

Present: Jamila, Andy, Lauren, Esta, Judy, Dave, Darnell, Elie, Bob.

Ex officio: Rob, Keisha, Katherine

Absent: Tom, Patti Keller

Notes by Nancy Koschmann

Update from Rob

The 2019-20 Annual Report is available and was sent out this morning to everyone on the Advisory Board.

Tess is leaving to take a position with the Yale Million Book Project. While staying with prison work, she will be closer to her family. Keisha Slaughter will be stepping into the position of Assistant Director.

Kyri will be leaving at the end of November from her position as Auburn Coordinator and will be working with the Racial Equity Institute, the organization she is already involved with. Betsye Violette will become the Coordinator at Auburn; she has agreed for the immediate future to also coordinate classes at Five Points.

We are presently searching for two positions, coordinators for Cayuga and Elmira. Patti Keller is helping to look at the applications.

Approval of June Minutes:

Jamila moved to approve the minutes and Judy seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved (after a discussion of the annual report).

Rob discussed high points of the annual report:

There has been a rapid decline in the NY prison population, at least 18% and possibly as much as 20%. One contributing factor is that the state facilities are not allowing new arrivals and the county jails are having to hold convicted persons. Therefore, there has been some attrition in our program. Prior to COVID-19, the mean number of classes taken by students was 2.6 but has now dropped to 1.6. Our concern is that transfers hold, that students continue to receive credit toward parole and that we keep them in the college community. So far, this seems to be the case.

The CPEP effort to help with masks was successful; as the chart in the annual report reveals, the department of corrections ultimately provided masks to all incarcerated people when it became apparent that masks were being distributed by outside agencies such as CPEP. (See annual report)

Presently CPEP is involved in assisting our students show eligibility for their \$1200 under the CARES Act. In order to receive their checks, students need to submit a 1040 but this has been the holdup. It has been difficult to get the 1040 form to the students.

Rob emphasized the importance of funding from foundations, especially the Mellon Foundation, as CPEP is still primarily a grant-funded program. There was more discussion on this later in the meeting.

Keisha gave a brief update:

Spring classes are mostly completed, although there are still a few outstanding incompletes. This is not unusual and the number of incompletes is about the same as other semesters.

Classes started later, in line with Cornell's later start date. The major issue at this time is the lack of responsiveness on the part of some students to CPEP communications. For instance, Five Points students especially are not sending back their materials. It is hoped that these instances are just kinks in the system which will soon be smoothed out.

The reading group is proving to be successful and popular. The project is headed by Jan Zeserson, Mary and Ann Martin, with eleven undergraduates helping with responses.

Elmira has capability for teleconferencing, as does Cayuga (although Cayuga needs better speakers, a problem being worked on.) We are hoping to use JPay to email students in the future. Questions could be cleared up in this way.

Rob continued his discussion of the annual report's fiscal aspects

Rob emphasized again the role of the Mellon Foundation. The Foundation customarily provides three grants of three years each, and CPEP is anticipating that we will receive a grant during the third year. Presently, we are in the middle of the second grant. In addition, Mellon occasionally provides a sum for an ongoing endowment when they complete the last grant. CPEP's goal is straightforward: to allow incoming incarcerated people to go to college. With continued funding, CPEP could have an even more robust presence in the facilities.

CPEP has also received an in-kind grant to work with the JC Service Foundation, an organization that has powered a Harlem re-entry program.

Questions

Issues included questions about the engagement of CPEP teaching assistants and instructors with the program under the Covid-19 guidelines and regulations. There was discussion around these aspects of the pandemic; concerns that CPEP not lose ground were expressed.

Report on Faculty Fellows

The main purpose of the Faculty Fellows program is to create a way to maintain and strengthen the CPEP academic community and to establish stronger a relationship with the wider Cornell community. At present, four of the faculty members to whom CPEP reached out agreed to become members of the program and to provide a talk. Joe Margulies, professor of law and Government will speak on Nov 9, Anthony Ong of Human Development will speak next spring 2021, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, assistant professor in the history department at Cornell University will provide a talk in the fall of 2021 and Suman Seth of Science and Technology will follow in the spring of 2022.

BA Task Force Update

This is an ongoing effort, and one that needs advocacy from both the top (administration) and the bottom (faculty). Whatever the Board can do to encourage a groundswell of support from faculty and the wider Cornell community would be helpful.

General Discussion

Darnell brought up the importance of expanding TAP as a resource for our students. He suggested that as a Board we might want to do that, perhaps with a task force focused on expanding TAP to incarcerated students. Also brought up was the Scholar Strategy Network, an organization of university-based scholars committed to using research to improve policy and strengthen democracy (quote from website), and the possibility of engaging with them on prison education policy and the expansion of TAP. Perhaps, also, we might want to contact the Cornell folks who work on educational legislation to see if we might be able to interest them in this issue.

Curriculum committee

Presently there are four members of the curriculum committee, Tom, Lauren, Nancy and Andy. It was suggested that they might want to meet soon with Keisha.

Respectfully submitted, Nancy Koschmann