

## **CPEP Board Meeting –9/24/21**

**10:30am-12pm**

**In attendance:** Jamila Michener, Rob Scott, Keisha Slaughter, Katherine McComas, Betseye Violette, Richard Rivera, Darnell Epps (left at 11:30am), Patricia Keller, Elie Blimes, Madeline Reynolds, Judy Appleton.

Jamila taking notes.

### **Planned Meeting Agenda**

- 10:30am – Greetings, welcome new board members & agenda overview (Jamila)
- 10:40 – Review and approval of minutes (Jamila)
- 10:45 – Update on CPEP courses/teaching this semester (Keisha)
- 11:00 – Annual Report Review & Questions (Rob)
- 11:20 – Update on part-time BA committee (Katherine)
- 11:30 – Strategies for engage former CPEP TAs (Elie)
- 11:50–Flex time to discuss lingering issues that board members have in mind
- 12:00–END

### **Meeting Notes**

- Jamila opens the meeting. Introduces new board members: Richard Rivera and Madeline Reynolds (who were present) as well as Ken McClane, Ella Diaz and Julilly Kolher-Hausamann (who were not present).
- Board votes to approve prior meeting minutes (from 5/19/21). Judy makes motion to approve, Richard seconds motion, all voting members vote to approve.
- Keisha offers an update on this semester (fall 21) in the prisons. There are 20 classes and 16 TAs. All but one class is being taught in person. There is a challenge with COs not masking or enforcing mask mandates. However, students are masking in classes. Students are grossly misinformed about COVID and vaccination. Some instructors are tackling the misinformation directly, offering our students information and knowledge about the vaccine and the virus.
- Keisha notes that they are trying to grow the cohorts. Molly Reed is offering a preparatory writing class at Cayuga. Similar preparation efforts are happening at other prisons. Entrance exams are scheduled. Auburn will have an entrance exam

in late Septembers, 20 students are currently signed up. Elmira entrance exam is on hold.

- CPEP is gearing up for the spring. They are currently set up to offer 30 courses, trying to gradually get back to pre-pandemic offerings (~40 courses). The challenges around getting back to pre-pandemic operation are multifaceted: on the instructor side, the student side, and the facility side.
- Keisha notes that she will be out on maternity leave within the next two weeks. Betsye Violette will take over her role on an interim basis.
- Patricia asked Keisha about cohort sizes. Keisha says a cohort is usually around 15 or 20 at most. As far as entrance exams the number of people sitting for exams varies a lot across facilities. There were 50 men who sat for the Cayuga exam (only 15 could be admitted). There was a lower than usual number of students who sat for exams at Auburn. Rob notes that one reason for the lower numbers is that there are fewer people in the prisons in general. Keisha mentioned that another reason is that students are being transferred because transfer holds were being lifted. Keisha also notes limits to the rooms that can be used in facilities and the space challenges are one of the barriers.
- Richard asks whether students in all classes have an opportunity to ask questions about COVID and get good public health related information from CPEP instructors. Is there a plan to systematically provide information? Keisha says that there is not a plan although it comes up organically in class. CPEP was considering bringing in additional materials to the prison for education purposes RE: COVID. DOCCS seemed open to it but not excited about it. Keisha notes that giving students stacks of paper won't necessarily be as effective as the conversations that emerge organically in the context of some trust and rapport.
- Note: Keisha says there was an incident where an instructor tested positive for COVID in one of the first classes. Some of the students had to be quarantined.
- Judy agrees that the classroom is an excellent vehicle for discussions around issues related to vaccination or COVID. Listening and being agile in the educational setting is crucial. Patricia notes in the chat: "I think the organic approach is a good one, it's such a complex issue ...and many seem both open to listening to information but already have formed opinions"

- Darnell asked Keisha about why the transfer holds are being lifted. Keisha and Rob elaborate and note that some of the holds being lifted are because of prior preferences of students before they were part of CPEP. Some of the transfer holds are also a part of larger political dynamics and enforcement practices related to contraband in Elmira.
- Rob notes that he has appealed to DOCCS about the transfer holds and has had 17 requests rejected.
- Rob mentioned that Elmira threw all CPEP books and materials in the garbage during a search/frisk. They threw everything into the dumpsters. Rob invoiced Albany for that. He has not received a reply yet. The situation at Elmira is chaotic.
- To explain the low numbers for entrance exams, Betseye explains the following in the chat “RE: low numbers of students sitting at entrance exams— Five Points has low, low numbers in general and a very young population. At ACF, students also let me know last night that ACF just changed the requirements for disciplinary for who can sit for the exam and that the way they “advertise” is not as easily accessible to students because of the new pattern of movement.”
- Jamila makes a note that we should revisit, discuss, and keep updated on how things are proceeding at Elmira, given all the chaos that Rob detailed.
- The meeting now shifts to discussing the annual report. Rob discusses the difficulty of assessing the trajectory of CPEP given the last year of change. Rob notes that the report is mostly centered on COVID. Rob announces that CPEP has been approved for another grant to increase efforts in the reentry arena. Rob notes that COVID has been a “constant tax” on all CPEP energy and effort. Rob notes: “we’re alive, we’re in an excellent financial position, we have an excellent team, and the students are very happy to see us in there.”
- Jamila notes that according to the Bylaws, the board will have to vote to endorse the report.
- Elie asks about whether the correspondence methods used during COVID have continuing value. Rob says that while there are some singular examples of success, the methods of distance teaching haven’t gone well. Keisha reinforces this and says that remote methods did not go well. CPEP doesn’t have the tools to make it work: “there is so much opportunity for things to go wrong, and it always seems to go wrong.” Keisha also says, “the key part is that students don’t

have Internet access.” Rob says in the chat: “Were the students to have internet access, the answer might be different.”

- Darnell has to leave early but notes in the chat before going that he endorses the report.
- Judy asks about new item in the budget: a grant from the Ascendium Foundation. Rob provides some detail, this is a very recent funding source.
- Jamila notes that it would be helpful to have budget information further back in time to put the numbers in the Annual report in better context.
- Rob notes that the board is historically critical to CPEP for informing the direction of CPEP in moments of transition. By forming committees and providing guidance, we can provide significant help and direction.
- The board votes to approve the Annual Report. Judy offered the motion, Patricia seconded.
- Jamila asks whether there is a way the board can offer more help (outside of board meetings). Rob says yes, it depends on who has time and stomach for it.
- Rob notes that staff are very attached and deeply involved, and the board can offer valuable feedback and insight on the choices they face through periodic briefings outside of the regular board meetings.
- Jamila suggests that some subset of board meetings convene for such a briefing before the end of year board meeting (in late October or early November 2021). Elie, Richard and Patricia volunteer for this. Jamila will follow-up.
- Elie asks Rob in the chat: “Let us know if you want additional support from us, like writing our own letters to Albany to advocate”
- Katherine updates the board on the possibility of Cornell offering a part-time bachelors to non-traditional students that would include incarcerated students (among others). The part time BA committee submitted its report to the Provost in June. Katherine notes that there has been a general positive response to the report. It has been shared with deans and leadership. It’s being socialized in the faculty senate. There is substantial enthusiasm about trying to find a way to make

it happen. Even an ambitious timeline: first cohort in fall of 2023? Some of the outstanding details Katherine points out:

- Direct admissions vs. earn your way in (prison students might matriculate after earning an associated degree through CPEP)
- Part time BA is envisioned as a remote learning opportunity but to what extent can this serve the needs of an incarcerated student population? Can we imagine a small cohort prospering in a digital environment?
- Input from the board as we the part time BA effort moves along will be useful.
- Jamila reinforces that board members and CPEP staff are well positioned to offer input as the part-time BA program develops.
- Elie takes the floor to discuss options for engaging former CPEP TAs. Elie notes that one of the losses of COVID is that TAs have lost connection to the program. CPEP is planning an event in November with Jamila & Anna. Elie suggests convening a follow-up event and optional conversation for former TAs and CPEP folks connected to the same topic. This is an idea to engage our former instructors. Elie asks for one or two volunteers to help plan the event in potentially December.
- Rob is in favor of this but suggests having the follow-up event in spring (February or March).
- Judy shares that there is a faculty fellow talk planned for this semester. No date yet, but there will be one and we will let board members know.