GSA Facilities and Healthcare Committee Meeting 4th December, 2013

Present: Paul Baranay, Angharad Davis, Chad Marion, Michael Parker, Wendy Xiao.

Apologies: No apologies recorded.

Meeting opened   
  
**Project Updates**

1. University Housing Committee (Wendy Xiao)

* WX has attended another meeting of this committee, at which a discussion was had regarding the nature of ideal spaces for graduate students. Topics that were raised included:
  + What kind/s of housing might be built?
  + Would there be advantages to having additional dormitories?
  + Parking space
  + Access to daycare for students with children
* AD was interested to hear daycare being brought up as an issue, since this is a matter of some concern to a number of her constituents. WX explained that as far as the housing committee goes, the daycare discussion is limited to issues of parking and transit accessibility, rather than the provision of daycare itself.
  + MP asked if daycare is available through Yale; WX said not really – there is some available but it is expensive and difficult to access (e.g. through early education programs offered by local magnet schools).
    - In addition to this, WX noted that there are other issues of particular concern for graduate students with families or who are expectant mothers, such as the lack of clear Connecticut safety standards regarding acceptable levels of lead and asbestos in buildings
  + CM noted that the university website indicates that some childcare centres are available.
    - MP observed that the provision of childcare services run through Yale (for the benefit of students, post-docs and employees with families) is something of a captive market, and should therefore feasibly be profitable to the university without needing to charge extortionate fees.
    - CM pointed out that one of the primary expenses of operating a childcare business is the issue of insurance, which would still be costly for the university.
  + WX enquired if we should pursue the childcare matter further
    - AD suggested that we might survey the graduate students in order to find out what the demand for childcare is, and what the issues with the current system are
      * CM observed that childcare is a very personal matter, and that individuals often have very specific requirements as to what they are looking for, so that a centralised childcare service might not be what people want.
      * CM also suggested that a survey include a question on what graduate students would be willing to pay for university childcare, should such become available.
    - AD commented that even if there is ultimately not much that we can do, or pressure the university to do, when it comes to the provision of daycare, it would still be useful to investigate some of the particular issues faced by graduate students and postdocs with children, as this tends to be a somewhat scattered demographic, and hence potentially one that is overlooked when programs are designed to enhance graduate student life.
* The issue of bad landlords in New Haven was also brought up at the housing committee meeting.
  + WX noted that a meeting has been scheduled to talk to the owners of Pike International; the committee is also looking into meeting with the owners of New Haven Towers (although some difficulties in tracing the ownership are currently being experienced).

1. Tax Advice (Chad Marion)

* CM was part of a conference call with Steve Blum, Charles Delveccho and John Caserta, who are assisting with the Tax Advice event early in 2014.
  + The current proposal is to run a single 2-hour event in the last week of January; within that will be 2 1-hour sessions, the first focusing on tax matters for U.S. citizens, and the second for international students.
  + Conversations are ongoing with other CPAs in the area, who might be interested in sitting on a discussion panel.
  + The timing of this event is important; late January is really as late as the participants can go; as it is it stands on the brink of the tax season which is prime accounting time!
* MP queried if an international student session was necessary; CM noted that no institutional support is available for international students with regard to state and local taxes, and that there have been mixed reports about the helpfulness of the OISS.
* WX queried if it would be possible to hold the event in early February, given that students typically don’t receive their tax forms until late January and are probably not thinking about their tax returns at that time of year.
  + CM noted that a later date would be problematic for the CPAs; in addition to this, the event is not really geared towards immediate and specific taxation problems, so students should not be disadvantaged by not having their forms yet.
  + AD pointed out that proper publicity will help garner an interested public, and that GSA representatives can be utilised to promote the event within their departments.
* CM enquired if there are large-scale graduate school events that we should plan around when setting a date for the Tax Advice event. He will look further into this, as well as investigating booking a room for the event.

1. Mental Health I (Paul Baranay)

* PB attended the promised follow-up meeting (re: the GSA/GPSS Mental Health Report) with Dr Siggins. Also in attendance were student representatives Ernest Baskin, Ariana Chao and Dan Wald, and administration representatives Kim Goff-Crewes, Cynthia Smith (Assistant Provost) and Katie Kelly (Yale Health: Member Services). Topics of discussion included:
  + Website changes
    - Some changes have already been made: for instance, providing more information on group therapy. However, PB still finds that information is difficult to locate (links available only in the side-bar etc), so further changes would be profitable.
    - PB recommended adding an anonymous ‘suggestion box’ to the Yale Health website to allow for further improvements
  + Advertising campaign
    - PB will meet with Katie Kelly from Yale Health to work on a potential advertising campaign
    - Dr Siggins is concerned that resources would need to be pulled away from other areas of MH&C in order to finance an advertising campaign; PB does not believe that this will be an issue.
    - There was also some concern about the purpose of an advertising campaign: PB underlined the point that the idea behind this is to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems, not necessarily to promote MH&C at Yale since it is already fairly heavily utilised.
    - Dr Siggins suggested, and PB agreed, that if going forward with an awareness campaign, materials should be tailored to the particular needs of students in particular locations/situations.
  + Peer resources
    - PB noted that, with regard to previous discussions of the potential usefulness of opening up Walden Peer Counselling to graduate students, that Walden serves primarily as a site for single-event discussions rather than ongoing therapy (and so has limitations).
      * Another very particular peer resource is the peer advocates found at the medical school, who take on an ombudsperson-like role (addressing concerns and tensions particular to the medical hierarchy)
    - PB raised the issue of whether student counsellors might be made available to the whole university community; if we are interested in pursuing this idea, we would need to bring a complete proposal (including finding people to train, supervise etc student counsellors)
      * WX noted that there are free clinics offered to medical students (although these do not currently include a mental health clinic). These are staffed by student physicians (who get credit for their work) and supervised by attending physicians; thus if this resource were to be expanded to serve other members of the community, it would need to be done while simultaneously building the program into the curriculum in order to make the additional work worthwhile for the student physicians.
      * MP asked if student advising could potentially be intertwined with teaching roles? (i.e. could you potentially take on the role of a student counsellor etc to fulfil a teaching requirement?)
        + WX suggested that this might be feasible within programs such as clinical psychology
  + Training/resources for Directors of Graduate Studies
    - It seems that D’sGS do meet up on a regular basis; PB and Dr Siggins will both bring up the issue of the DGS’s role within departments (qua pastoral care etc) with Dean Pollard
  + Wait times at MH&C
    - The statistics regarding waiting times within MH&C seem to be quite fluid at this point, which is frustrating when it comes to pinpointing problems and making adjustments. However, there are reasons for this fluidity, including the seasonal flux of intakes, and temporary staff shortages (due to therapists being on leave etc)
    - Some stop-gap measures for those experiencing longer than average wait times might be attempted. Dan Wald enquired whether some sort of automated updates from Yale Health might be possible (so that students are still ‘in the loop’ about their expected wait time); this will potentially be easier when MH&C completes its transition to electronic record-keeping.
      * PB suggested that it might be feasible to include a ‘longer than average wait time’ notification on the Yale MH&C website when relevant. WX suggested that general practitioners operating within Yale Health might also be able to take on depression/anxiety screening as part of their general care duties.
* Another meeting will take place next semester.
  + Further questions to address include whether it would be more helpful for MH&C to have an additional clinician or a preventative care person?
    - The committee agreed on the latter, but there was some concern that this would overload the current clinicians.
    - WX suggested that someone talk to the clinical psychology program; ideally they might be able to provide additional support for the current clinicians while also gaining valuable experience.
    - CM noted that there is an overall shortage of psychologists/psychiatrists in Connecticut; PB observed that, while true, that is not the primary problem when it comes to potentially expanding or otherwise supporting the work of Yale MH&C

1. Mental Health II (Angharad Davis)

* AD attended the Yale College Council’s Forum on Campus Culture and Wellbeing on 16th November, which was chaired by the three authors of the YCC’s mental health report.
  + The event was essentially concerned with campus culture from the perspective of undergraduate students and student groups, and did not seek to engage with finding institutional solutions. For this reason, and because of the comparative brevity of the meeting and the focus on small, structured brainstorming activities rather than freeform discussion, this event did not replace the potential usefulness of a Mental Health Retreat, as discussed previously at F&H meetings.
  + A number of student organisations were represented (including Y-Mindful [a meditation group], Flourish, Mind Matters, Inspire Yale); in addition to these, key student representatives were present from the Communication and Consent Educators, freshmen counsellors, chaplain’s office fellows, and the Calhoun Happiness Project. The vice-director of SHARE was also in attendance.
* Many ideas were brainstormed, a number of which are pertinent to the plans that F&H have been making.
  + The possibility of bathroom advertising was discussed, and widely agreed to be a good plan. The YCC representatives assumed responsibility for further work on this idea.
    - AD asked if the F&H committee should get in touch with the YCC to discuss plans for shared advertising; PB suggested that we hold off until we hear more about potentially collaborating with Yale Health on their advertising campaign.
  + There was also widespread support for the notion of holding a university Mental Health Week, although no additional planning was done on this topic.
    - WX queried what the benefits of Mental Health Week would be; AD and PB identified these as raising general levels of awareness about mental health issues, decreasing stigma, and creating a positive/supportive campus environment in which these issues can be discussed. (NB the primary value is cultural rather than clinical; events such as these, which may include workshops on stress-relief/meditation etc., are not intended to stand in for medical care for those in need of it.)

**Any Other Business**

* AD noted that with regard to students taking medical leave, there is a lack of clear guidance available on university websites regarding which steps need to be taken and who to contact with various questions.
  + A similar issue was raised at the YCC Forum on Campus Culture and Wellbeing, where it was suggested that further details might be provided in a revamped Yale Health website.
  + An additional concern is that students on medical leave lose access to university facilities, including borrowing rights at the library. There are obviously good reasons for this; however, since all students must complete a predetermined-upon piece of academic work in order to return to full-time study, it might be worth discussing the ramifications of this.
  + In addition, it seems that there are some other students who also lose library access at inconvenient times (e.g. DMA students in the School of Music who are ABD).
    - AD will be in contact with the library committee representative on the Academic and Professional Development committee and will report back.

Meeting closed