FHC Committee Meeting Minutes

12/5/12

Guest speaker: Lisa Brandes, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Director of Graduate Student Life, to discuss housing and dining issues

Grad apartments are leased on a first come, first served basis; only a few dozen units open up each year but there are ~300 applicants

The most common complaints to the grad housing office are about dining, especially high cost and lack of access on weekends/to undergrad dining halls. The main cause of the high price of the dining plan is unionized labor costs. Dining has decide to keep the undergrad dining halls open during the holiday break, mostly for student athletes, but grad students will be excluded.

There is a lack of communication between housing and dining because they are not in the same administrative ‘silo’; Dining reports to Ernie Huff, who reports to Shauna King. The college Masters made a unilateral decision to start enforcing the exclusion of grad students from Sunday dinners. Dining, housing and transit all share certain issues but the important people from each area are never in the same room to discuss problems – this is the main goal of convening a university-wide committee on housing. Lisa seemed more in favor of having a graduate housing committee instead because many of the issues we’re having don’t apply to undergrads, faculty, etc. In the past GSA has been more successful with the broader approach – it gives us more bargaining power.

In terms of actually forming a university-wide committee on housing, Lisa recommended asking Peter Salovey or Kim Goff-Crews to convene it. The deans are on board with the idea but want us to submit a report first explaining what issues the committee needs to address. Potential members include George Longyear (housing), someone from University Properties, Thomas Tucker and Rafi Taherian (dining), transit, international student office. Michelle and Eugene are planning to gather data from Lisa, George Longyear and Thomas Tucker regarding housing and dining usage.

The new School of Management will have a dining hall, café and ‘executive’ dining

Housing: Michelle met with Bruce Alexander and John Bollier to discuss the proposed grad dorm on Broadway (see notes below). Regarding underutilization of grad housing web resources, we could ask Tolu to put something in the newsletter and on our website/Facebook. If we do renter clinics in the spring this would be a natural way to promote the tools as well. Lauren mentioned that parking availability is becoming an issue and would have to be kept in mind for any expansion of on-campus/Downtown housing.

Legal Aid: 6 lawyers and 15 students attended the most recent Ask-a-Lawyer event. A lot of immigration issues are coming up, which require special expertise. There was a proposal from within the committee to hold renter clinics/brown bag lunches in the spring. This would also promote the housing website’s databases. Taylor will take the lead on this.

Dental: Jake and Eugene met with GPSS regarding this, currently looking into alternatives to Delta Dental

Mental health: currently compiling data

HGS renovation: Nick is on the email list for this committee, it will probably meet in January. HGS has too many purposes (housing, classrooms, offices, etc) for the space, there is pressure to convert the tower bedrooms into faculty offices

Gym: GPSS submitted gym and library report/requests to the administration without GSA involvement

Westville Shuttle: the ad hoc committee located a potential park-n-ride location and mapped out routes that would open up housing opens in Edgewood/Dwight and Westville. The shuttle would also stop at Stop n Shop and St. Raphael’s. There is a separate proposal for partnering with CT transit to start a UPASS program for graduate students; Yale would pay CT transit a discounted rate and graduate students would have unlimited access to the bus system. CT transit is not willing to comp the cost of a pilot program ($10-25,000), so we would have to ask the administration to cover it. There is a question of whether ridership would be high enough, and this program would not be for postdocs, staff, etc.

Healthcare while away from Yale: Caitlyn will meet with Dean Harper-Mangels

Other: Kim Goff-Crews wants our $ requests by February, so let Lauren know what the priorities should be.

13 November 2012

Notes from Broadway housing project meeting

Bruce Alexander, Vice President for New Haven and State Affairs and Campus Development

John Bollier, Associate Vice President for Facilities Operations

Michelle Kriner, GSA Facilities and Healthcare Committee

Broadway graduate housing stats:

~250 beds, combination of studios and 2BR

Nine floors; first and second floors were dorm lobby, student lounge, retail and a 6-screen movie theater, ninth floor was a library

Study spaces, commons, buttery, activities center

All bedrooms were along Dixwell and Goffe streets (with windows)

Large parking garage, basement bike storage

Yale acquired the triangle of property between Dixwell/Goffe from vertex to fire station (John Bollier will send me a map with an outline of the property). There is a church on that property that Yale paid to relocate – they should be out within a year

The building was intended to replace Helen Hadley Hall, which would’ve been demolished and replaced with an engineering building. The plan never got past the conceptual stage or into the capital plan (this apparently happened to a lot of plans in 2008 when Yale’s endowment took a 25% hit). There was also a plan to put a police substation across the street on Lake Place.

As of now, there are no plans to expand on-campus graduate housing. Helen Hadley is currently being renovated; upgrading bathrooms/common spaces/hallways, increasing the number of electrical outlets, replacing windows (this is difficult to do without disrupting residents, may be coupled to a room-painting program). Non-Yale-affiliated housing developments are currently planned in Science Park and Chapel/Howe

Bruce seemed generally unaware that housing availability and the power that it gives landlords is a problem, but would be on board to address the issue if there is sufficient cause. He feels that students generally prefer to live off campus unless they are new international students. He would be very interested in survey results regarding how grad students feel about housing options. The problem of not having enough housing is recent; more students are choosing to stay in the area after graduating, rents used to be extremely low (in some cases lower than maintenance costs) because there was a big surplus of units.

Bruce asked me to keep him in the loop and also recommended contacting Janet Lindner, who works in the grad student housing office and is also involved in transit. Bruce seemed to think that the cost of adding shuttles to Westville might be worth it if the other option is building more dorms.

A related issue is the underutilization of the graduate student housing office and web resources. They have systems set up for landlord rating, roommate searching, apartment listings, etc, but my feeling is that most students don’t know about them and as a result there aren’t enough postings, ratings, etc for these tools to be useful. Maybe the GSA publicity committee could help with this?