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International Programs minutes 02/28/2014

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International Programs Committee meeting minutes [approved April 3, 2014]

February 28, 2014, 9 am, Prairie Lounge

Present: Marynel Ryan Van Zee (Faculty, chair), Sarah Buchanan (Faculty), Ed Brands (Faculty), Jimmy Schryver (Faculty), Sarah Ashkar (Study Abroad Advisor), Chlene Anderson (P&A), Zehua/Jack Zhang(Student), Molly Donovan (Student)

Absent: Pilar Eble (ex-officio, Assistant Director of International Student Programs), Alexander Kachan (Student), Michael Peters (Student), Irene Maloney (USA)

Guests: Leslie Gubash (Equity, Diversity and International Programs Office), Monica Rin (Student)

On the heels of our study abroad application season, Sarah Buchanan began by suggesting a future agenda item: Should study abroad scholarship applications for May and summer programs be moved up to December, so students know in advance of applying whether they have funding?

Chlene noted that depending on the review committee, the process and criteria for evaluating study abroad scholarship applications vary. It was agreed that we should come up with a collective understanding of the criteria by which the applications should be assessed.

Sarah Buchanan and Sarah Ashkar also suggested that once we know which programs are going for May and summer 2015, we get promotional material up in the ACE office. This would help students have the information they need to initiate discussions with parents over the summer, etc. We were perhaps only 4 students short of having all of our programs run this year, so recruitment is on our minds.

The committee turned to the primary agenda item for the meeting: making more effective connections between international and domestic students at UMM. Molly Donovan and Monica Rin began the conversation.

Molly's seen a clear division over the time she's been here. International students don't seem to branch out and domestic students "clique" up and do not connect with international students. She had been interested in creating efforts to bridge the gap between international and domestic students and figure out what the obstacles are.

Monica approached her with some ideas and petitions. Her experience in California was that great interactions occurred at the college where she was previously; great learning experiences can come from those interactions and at UMM, we acknowledge this in offices, but not in activities.

Examples: students who are preparing for study abroad interacting with students from their destination country [e.g., China]; language tandems – she's never seen that here.

Overall involvement by international students on campus seems very low to her. Monica noted that international students may not feel comfortable reaching out, so it may be up to the domestic students to take the initiative. She also suggested that Asian language classes be offered; if we

really deem those languages as critical and we want to encourage study abroad in Asia, we are doing our students a disservice.

Can IPC bring this suggestion about Asian languages to the Dean/UMM in order to advance this?

Sarah Buchanan noted a few issues: clearly, offering the language is itself important; but it also needs to be deeper than a one-year sequence; one problem we face is not offering Mandarin– we have trouble in offering language classes in general and enrollment in language programs is, overall, low. The Confucius Institute program is not a real option.

Sarah Ashkar noted she's seen a greater interest in our Korean and Japanese exchanges; interest in the Chinese exchanges is low partially because of the inability to prepare in language and continue upon return. Jimmy mentioned that we should connect this to Bart's urging that we use our exchanges more.

Monica has a survey/petition pushing for the addition of Asian Languages [Japanese and Korean classes also suggested in addition to Mandarin]; she noted that the Japanese and Korean languages easier to learn within a one-year time frame than Mandarin.

Sarah Ashkar and Marynel noted that a number of students have also asked about Arabic.

Overall, we identify 'critical languages' but we don't offer them. If we got a one –year position, we'd be lucky and it would probably be Mandarin or Arabic; we'd not receive both.

Marynel and Sarah Buchanan mentioned that some federal funding is probably available to support the expansion of language offerings at US colleges. The new ACE coordinator is supposed to have grant-writing experience –perhaps the new person could help with that.

Leslie Gubash spoke on the original topic of connections between international and domestic students. She described the international liaison program – a newer initiative between ORL and her office, in which 2 liaisons bridge gaps in communication between CAs and international students, etc. International students, especially Chinese students, will often turn to their friends before turning to a CA. Training is provided by ORL and Leslie's office.

Liaisons are also supposed to help with the floor activities planned by CAs; concerns have been expressed that floor activities are often not interesting to intl. students; Leslie's office is also working with dining services to ask for better food options [intl. students often cook for themselves, even though they often pay meal plan fees].

Another initiative is the friendship program – matches domestic and international students, offers interactive activities and assistance with solidifying friendships; participation and the strength of the connections vary from semester to semester.

The office also organizes around holiday celebrations. International students are sometimes alone on campus; the adopt-a-student program connects with faculty, staff, community members who invite students to events/meals. Sometimes students [esp. friendship program students] will invite their international student friends to their homes – this can be a problem with the length of

break/stay and sense of overstaying welcomes but not being able to get back to UMM and/or go somewhere else.

This year's Spring Festival included a lot more collaboration this year between international and domestic students.

Molly has attended friendship events in the past but has not seen announcements recently. She finds this a great program but real friendship needs to happen more organically – how can we connect that beginning with something deeper/more meaningful? How can we make structures that create more natural friendship formation?

International students say they really want to make American friends and they know about the programs, but they then don't respond especially well to the activities on offer. ISP has tried to link up with big events on campus [like pre-Zombie Prom activities] and American holidays; is working on international game nights, in which students bring and explain games, etc.

Monica finds these friendship programs ineffective. Like Leslie, she thinks we need to figure out how to get people more committed. Leslie has heard that offering some sort of field trip once a semester might be appealing.

Involvement in general is quite low. The committee continued to brainstorm on ideas for bridging the gap between international and domestic students and Leslie explained more of the initiatives and challenges as she sees them.

One of these is the different cultural weight placed on extra-curricular involvement on campus among the international students. It seems that like jaded faculty members, many international students do not see the benefit of being involved on campus beyond their classwork.

Maybe a place to start would be the international students and asking what they want.

The committee discussed the SUFE Orientation at some length. It's necessary to experience American and Morris culture to know what information is important to share with potential students. SUFE instructors haven't always been to the USA and cannot convey what is significant.

When our students study abroad part of the experience is getting to know people. American students go for the adventure and to learn about a different culture. Chinese students go abroad for a degree.

Some potential ideas were floated:

Should we have automatic officer positions for international students in clubs? Should we require club membership to be an Ambassador? We do some work with developing oral skills – passport program international students have to go to a student organization meeting; have to invite an American.

When a program has been successful, it has usually been mandated. We probably couldn't mandate club membership for international students because we don't mandate it for domestic students.

We need to create systems that make it easy for students to get involved in clubs and campus events.

Chinese students are not always happy with the food here. Could there be a cooking club?

The resident floor is possibly the best starting point to develop connections. Could there be more floor-specific activities?

Could ORL have an option on the housing form that allows Chinese students to specifically request an American roommate and vice versa?

Some activities (for example, pumpkin carving) are good as surface activities, but may not lead to deeper connections.

Maybe the Friendship Club could have more teambuilding activities like camping, rope course.

Could the Friendship Club become a student organization with Leslie as the advisor? Then they could get student activities funding [note that it was not exactly clear where funding could come from; new student orgs have to wait some time before drawing fees funding].

The meeting was adjourned at _____.

Minutes submitted by Marynel Ryan Van Zee, Jimmy Schryver, Sarah Buchanan, and Chlene Anderson.