

Student Affairs Committee’s 2023-24 report

This report is based on meeting minutes, subcommittee reports, and other meeting notes compiled during the Fall and Spring semesters of the 2023-24 academic year. The report is a somewhat detailed account of the tasks and issues that the committee worked on this past Fall and Spring. It’s worth noting that this committee divided into six subcommittees. These smaller groups allowed the committee to focus its attention on a number of different tasks/issues—whether new or part of ongoing initiatives—simultaneously. This report ends with a vision for how this committee hopes to continue working to improve students’ experience at Stockton University.

A. Fall 2023 & Spring 2024

We met as a whole group three times in the Fall of 2023, and three times in this past Spring semester. Six new members joined the committee last fall. So, the first meeting was mostly spent on updating new members on the work that the committee was engaged in (e.g. [List of Charges](#)) and to reach consensus on a way forward—that is whether to continue some of the work, and discuss potential new initiatives. We decided to create subcommittees and assigning specific tasks/initiatives to each subcommittee.

Table 1. Subcommittee and Initiatives

Subcommittees	Initiative(s)
Thierry Joe	Develop a better understanding of the university’s response to Hate speech (Valerie Hayes’ office)
Brad Forrest Charlie Baik Rania Almajid Jeff Ge	tension/conflict between some attendance policies and students’ rights to privacy (CARE office & Wellness Center)
Sunny Mathew Thierry	dissemination of information about resources on campus
Mike Hayse Susan Cydis Joe	Explore the needs and interests of students pertaining to the graduation ceremony.

Bob Blaskiewicz Joe	explore possible disconnect between Admissions and Advising.
Joe & Mike	Search for & recruit student liaisons—one undergraduate and one graduate student.

The plan was for small groups of 2 or more members to meet and work on specific tasks throughout the course of the semester. During each whole group meeting, time was dedicated for subcommittee progress reports; and, if applicable, subcommittees used those opportunities to make recommendations or suggestions concerning some task(s). Below is an overview and evaluation of tasks this committee worked on during the Fall 2023 semester:

a. Understanding the university’s response to hate speech (Joe, Thierry):

This task came up during the 22-23 academic year. It emerged out of anecdotal accounts of hate speech that students shared with some members of the committee. During discussions of those incidents, two questions came up:

- What is the university’s response plan or strategy for dealing with hate speech on campus?
- Are students/faculty/staff, especially those with marginalized identities or/and of minoritized status, aware of the resources available to help deal with hate speech directed at them?

In an attempt to answer those questions, we met with Dr. Valerie Hayes, Chief Officer for Diversity & Inclusion, to discuss things like reporting mechanisms, incident reports, and the university’s plan for addressing the tension between freedom of speech Vs. hate speech. We also had the benefit of having Dr. Haley Baum, Assistant Vice President for Student Advocacy, Belonging & Campus Standards and Dean of Students, as part of the committee. The subcommittee assigned to this task was advised to reach out to Tammy Saunders, Director of Title IX & EEO, who oversees behavior that implicates policies on discrimination, harassment and works also with Bias Incidents—however, we were not successful in meeting Dr. Saunders. Conversations with Drs. Hayes and Haley, and other discussions that came out of whole group and subcommittee meetings make clear that developing a better understanding for the university’s plan for dealing with hate speech, and for supporting and protecting students/staff/faculty who are victims of hate speech is

a very complicated and multi-layered task. We concluded that this task is incomplete. We hope and recommend that this committee—and incoming chair Dr. Bob Blaskiewicz continue working studying and learning about the university’s existing (and even future) plans for dealing with hate speech without having to compromise anyone’s freedom of speech.

b. Attendance Policy Vs Students’ Rights to Privacy (Brad, Charlie, Rania, Jeff)

The committee decided on this issue during the 22-23 AY. We understand that this is another complicated issue because it requires, among other things, a balance between academic freedom and students’ rights to privacy. However, the committee feels strongly about the role it can play in helping students, faculty, and staff develop practices and a culture wherein attendance policies are not in conflict or competition with students’ rights to medical privacy, or worse in violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The subcommittee that focused on this initiative developed a list of recommendations and resources that can be the beginning of building practices that are inclusive of students’ rights and sensible attendance policies:

- Stockton University’s Course Attendance Policy: First, the committee wonders how familiar are students and faculty members with the university’s attendance policy (i.e. [Procedure File Number: 2030](#)). The procedure states clearly that “*For all absences due to illness, medical condition or emergency, the student should immediately complete the Stockton Cares online form...Upon return to the University, the student must present written verification of the nature of the illness and/or emergency and its duration to the Stockton Cares office. **Written verification should not be requested by or provided to the instructor.***” One of the recommendations from the subcommittee is coordination between academic programs/schools, Student Affairs, Academic affairs, Faculty/Staff/Student Senate, and other appropriate offices to ensure that Procedure 2030 is part of a common language, culture, and practices surrounding classroom attendance policies.
- Collect Data & Provide Support: The subcommittee also recommends the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection to identify areas—individual courses

or certification programs—where adherence to Procedure 2030 may pose challenges or conflict with accreditation or academic requirements.

- CARES’s training: It’s also important to note that there’s a plan in place to provide training around this issue with every school and program at the university.
- Other Institution’s Policies: This subcommittee also compiled a list of attendance policies from a few other universities (i.e. [List here](#)). This list makes clear that Stockton’s Procedure 2030 provides much greater clarity around attendance policies and much stronger protection for students’ rights to medical privacy.
- Student Involvement: The committee is also interested in how we can get more students aware of Procedure 2030. We are aware of the work that CARES and other offices are already doing during student and new faculty orientations to get the information out. However, we feel strongly that more can and should be done around this issue particularly as it relates to students knowing that they have the rights to keep their medical records and situation private. We recommend asking Student Senate to take the lead on coming with initiatives or ways to make Procedure 2030 part of every Stockton student’s everyday vocabulary.
- Center for Teaching and Learning Design (CTLTD): The subcommittee also proposes involving the CTLTD in efforts to make Procedure 2030 part of the culture surrounding attendance policies. One immediate way the CTLTD can help is by borrowing language from Procedure 2030 to include in its syllabi templates that many faculty members and schools use to develop syllabi for their own courses.

c. Dissemination of information about student resources (Thierry, Sunny)

This issue was born out of a discussion about so many students with issues such as food insecurity, housing, money-related problems...yet unaware of resources on campus. Our last undergraduate student liaison brought up the question: ‘why does it seem like the university is better at reaching students who owe money than it is at reaching students who need support?’ This is another complicated issue; one that many other post-secondary institutions are also struggling to resolve. However, this committee chose to take on the task of, at least, understanding the university’s existing and future plan for making it easier for struggling students to connect to resources on campus. We decided to

take on the perception of the university being more efficient and successful at reaching students who owe money than it is at connecting students to support.

- Meeting with IT: The subcommittee met with Scott Huston and Pete Gallagher to begin its exploration into the issue of dissemination of information about resources. One possible explanation that came up is that individual offices/programs collect their own student data/info necessary to know how to target their efforts/resources—which makes sense. However, this also means that there doesn't seem to exist a central hub or office whose responsible for the dissemination of information about resources on campus. Students dealing with multiple challenges (e.g. food & housing insecurity) will likely receive multiple emails from different offices (that will likely be ignored).
 - New Initiative: It's important to note that Dr. Ashlee Roberts has been designated to lead the charge to improve the university's overall communication plan, including its dissemination of information about resources. Jameel Harrison, the Director of Student Affairs and Assessment, also came up as someone recently hired to help with this new communication initiative. The committee views this as a long-term project and intends to continue working on developing a more sophisticated understanding for how the university helps connect student to resources on campus.
 - The subcommittee's recommendation to the committee and incoming chair is to invite Dr. Roberts and Mr. Harrison to a meeting so that they can brief them on this new initiative.
- d. Graduation Ceremony (Mike, Susan, Joe): Issues with graduation were brought up earlier in the academic year. Concerns were shared about the length of the ceremony, poor faculty attendance and the fact that students and families were leaving before the end of the ceremony—at times during someone's speech. The task was to first assess the needs and interests of students pertaining to the graduation ceremony, and also figure out ways this committee can lend support to the people like Craig Stambaugh and Alex Marino who help to plan the ceremony. The subcommittee working on this issue reported that the people in charge of graduation conveyed to them that they designed a plan to address

some of the concerns about previous years' ceremonies. This subcommittee had nothing further to do concerning this task.

e. Admission and Advising (Bob, Joe)

This issue came to our attention from people working in advising. There seems to be dueling agendas between Admission's vision/implementation of student orientation and Academic Advising. One of the main concerns is that students do not have time to process the amount of information they are receiving at orientation and registration which leads to many problems with course registration, proper course placement...just to name a few. This is very much an ongoing initiative. The subcommittee focused on this shared that the plan is that Advising will be gathering data about how its resources are used during orientation events. This should give the committee a sense of the scope of the perceived disconnect.

B. Next Steps

As mentioned earlier in this report, Dr. Bob Blaskiewicz will chair this committee starting in the Fall of 2024. So, he will be helping to steer and shape the vision and mission of this committee. I have the utmost confidence that Dr. Blaskiewicz is going to keep this committee focused on and committed to working to improve "all matters of student life." I am also confident that he will continue to develop more efficient ways to work on and complete tasks. In my view, the wealth of expertise and diversity of experiences among members of this committee can truly help to make a difference in the ways students experience Stockton. Through the work we began this past academic year and will hopefully continue into next year, we can be the university's staunchest student advocates.

Committee Members

Thierry Saintine Chair GENS (2022–2024)

Vice Chair Joe Cirio GENS (2023–2024)

Michael Hayes ARHU (2023–2025)

Charlie Baik BUSN (2023–2025)

Susan Cydis EDUC (2023–2025)

Bob Blaskiewicz GENS (2023–2025)

Rania Almajid HLTH (2023–2025)

Rui (Jeff) Ge Library (2023–2025)

Bradley Forrest NAMS (2023–2025)

Sunny Matthew SOBL (2023–2025)

Ex Officio Members

Christopher Catching Vice President for Student Affairs

Haley Baum Dean of Students