

CONVERSATIONS  
Friday, November 7, 2008  
At Alfred Guillaume's House

Allen Anderson, Criminal Justice  
David Barton, Arts  
Christine Chmielewski, Advising Center  
Hayley Froysland, History  
Alfred Guillaume, Academic Affairs  
Jeff Jackson, Career Services  
Jeff Jones, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management  
Doug McMillen, Chemistry and CLAS  
Cynthia Murphy-Wardlow,  
Micheline Nilsen, Arts  
Mae Reck, Chancellor  
Tamea Rector, Arts  
Becky Torstrick, Anthropology

Alfred Guillaume, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, welcomed everyone and introduced this causerie which was to focus on advising at IU South Bend. During Spring 2008, Vice Chancellor Guillaume had convened a committee of faculty and staff to review current advising practices and make recommendations for improvement. Those in attendance were sent a copy of those recommendations to review before tonight's discussion. However, it was important to hear new and fresh insights about this important activity. Advising is not just proper course selection. It's mentoring, helping students to stretch and explore.

The first topic to be broached was the infrastructure to support advising: Onestart, degree audits, electronic drops. People would like to see the time extended for students to do their own electronic drops. This would bring us more in line with other IU campuses as well. Using Onestart to assign advisors to students, especially freshmen, was also seen as a positive step. One suggestion was to force all freshman students and probationary students to see an advisor in order to register. Fine Arts does this now. Tamea takes off the codes once she knows a student has been advised. She also provides information to students about courses and requirements. The degree audit situation is still not completely fixed so students cannot use the computerized system to help them with course selection. However, the Registrar's office is making progress on this.

The next topic we discussed was advisors themselves and their preparation for advising. There is a problem with the preparation of faculty members who are advising. Some faculty members are more knowledgeable and do a better job than others. Because we have no system of assessment of advising in place, it's not possible to know what we are doing that is good and what is bad. Arts does evaluate each advising session by giving students a t-shirt if they turn the evaluation in but most other units have no similar systems in place. We need to get more faculty members involved in direct advising. PAC has done a good job of providing training; their recent session on appreciative

advising was well-attended and well-received. However, we need to have a set training program and certain expected practices that are consistent across units.

Then we turned to our students, as someone noted that advising needs a village to do it well because our students have multiple needs. Much discussion focused on undecided students and how to help them in choosing majors (and ultimately careers). One complaint was that the new general education gives students no room to take electives. However, it was pointed out that, in terms of total hours completed, the new general education is actually greatly reduced for many students. In addition, students no longer face the problem of needing to complete new general education requirements when they shift between schools as they did in the past. The working class culture of the vast majority of our students means that they do not question when told things, but accept whatever they are told. Middle-class students are more likely to ask for exceptions. Since our students may not know the right questions to ask, we have to do a better job of figuring out what it is they really need to know. Students are given a lot of information at orientation and they do not retain most of it. We could be doing more to reinforce the various how-to's of advising, registering, choosing majors for our students by using podcasts, videos, and workshops. Other students could be used to familiarize freshmen and transfer students with how our system works. We should develop our students into communities of learners. Looking at housing, we should have triage teams available at the community building to be available for students. We could also set up tables around campus where students could come to ask questions, rather than them having to go from office to office. We target a lot of our efforts to reach first and second year students, particularly students who are in trouble. What do we know about the students we are losing, who are transferring out? One final idea was to let departments know about potential majors as these students are admitted to the campus. The department could establish earlier contacts with these students and may be able to help with recruiting them to enroll.

After two hours of discussion, causerie members enjoyed dinner and continued their discussions informally.

Notes submitted by  
Becky Torstrick  
January 12, 2009