

Summary of Student Perspectives Series Meeting, May 27, 2021

Trustees in Attendance: Michael J. Klingensmith, Steven A. Kersten, and Paula Wolff.

Students in Attendance: Itzel Velázquez Sánchez (4th Year, College, Undergraduate Liaison), Steven Wendeborn (2nd Year MBA student, Chicago Booth, Graduate Liaison), Naa Ashitey (4th Year, College), Myles Hudson (4th Year, College), Parul Kumar (3rd Year, College), Angel Rosales (2nd Year, College), Donna Son (2nd Year, College), Joanna Zhang (3rd Year, College).

Guest in Attendance: Meredith Daw, Associate Vice President of Enrollment and Student Advancement, Associate Dean of the College, and Executive Director, Career Advancement.

This meeting centered on College students' perspectives on support they receive from the College and University and included a discussion of the challenges some first-generation, low-income, international and underrepresented students face as they navigate UChicago's requirements, opportunities and resources.

The meeting commenced with Mr. Klingensmith providing welcome remarks and asking those in attendance to introduce themselves. Following introductions, he then described the role and responsibilities of the Board and how they are distinct from those of the University's senior leadership and administration. While members of the Board provide oversight of major University decisions and strategies, appoint the University president, and make significant philanthropic contributions, they do not involve themselves with day-to-day operations or academic decisions, which are the purview of the administration and the faculty, respectively. Mr. Klingensmith summarized the purpose of the Student Perspectives Series as a vehicle for student input on various matters to be relayed to University leadership and other trustees, and noted that comments made by the trustees at SPS meetings reflect their own views and not those of the Board as a whole.

The discussion started with a few framing remarks and observations. Although some students in the College find the University's overall student communication efforts to be lacking, there is a desire to seek ways to improve the student experience and not just complain about it. There is recognition that highly selective U.S. colleges and universities like UChicago invest disproportionately more in student services and resources than the least-selective institutions (\$92K versus \$12K per student in 2007 according to one study¹). Indeed, UChicago provides its students with many opportunities but some students have difficulty finding out about them and thereby potentially miss out on making connections that would help them in their academic and professional pursuits.

¹ Hoxby CM (2009). The changing selectivity of American colleges. *NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 15446*, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w15446/w15446.pdf. Accessed 05/31/2021.

Based on their past experience, the trustees were asked to give their advice to students on balancing the many obligations of UChicago academics with part-time jobs, co-curricular activities, and personal matters. The trustees provided some observations. Life, in general, is about the struggle to find an appropriate balance between commitments and interests and confronting the challenge of being overwhelmed by a multitude of opportunities and choices. In some ways, exposure to this struggle in the College helps prepare students for a life-long “juggling act” if they plan on having a multi-dimensional future with many goals, interests and passions. It can help to try to align academic and job requirements with personal interests so that the tasks you are required to do can also be fun. But the pressure is real, and that has not changed over time. Can the University help alleviate this pressure and is any guidance provided during students’ first weeks in the College, including orientation?

While a lot of information and opportunities are presented during O-Week (tours, programs, advising sessions, etc.), many FLI (first-generation, low-income and immigrant) students still struggle with knowing whom and when to ask for direction as they learn about the University. They perceive that College life is harder for them and feel that they lack the support necessary to find opportunities.

One student elaborated on this further by describing how FLI and under-represented minority (URM) backgrounds intersect with academics in STEM disciplines, which typically require a sequential and carefully planned series of courses and experiences in order to be prepared for advanced scholarship and graduate study. Many public high schools do not adequately prepare their students for elite colleges and universities, which makes it especially important that these latter institutions provide advising systems and specialists that are geared toward under-represented students interested in STEM fields. Such tailored expertise in the College and divisions will lead to better access and outcomes for FLI and underrepresented students around academic performance and competitiveness for fellowships, scholarships, and grad school admission.

Several other student observations followed. Some students working in laboratories on research projects receive academic credit which precludes being remunerated. If students are dedicating many hours a week to this form of academic work, it may lead to financial challenges if they cannot find the time for paid assignments. (Relatedly, some students with paid research work were unable to access their labs this year because of pandemic restrictions, leading to financial challenges.) Incoming Student Government leaders would like to start an undergraduate student advocacy office, modeled on [one](#) at the University of California at Berkeley, to assist students with academic policies, finances and Title IX issues, among other matters. Students are concerned about the effects of the revised academic calendar (scheduled to be fully implemented in academic year 2021-2022), particularly with respect to the quickened pace of a 9-week quarter and a reading period that coincides with weekend days, preventing students from engaging in their regular weekend activities.

The discussion then turned to advising resources in the College. Students spoke highly about [CAAP](#) (Chicago Academic Achievement Program) and noted that it was well-resourced and very beneficial to student participants, especially since the CAAP cohorts overlap with other incoming groups, such as the [QuestBridge](#) scholars. Students would like to see CAAP expanded to serve a higher number of incoming first-years and also extend beyond the first year. The transition from specialized CAAP advising to “regular” advising in the College may lead to students losing the momentum and structure for longer-term planning. Continuity in advising over all four years of the College experience is highly desired among students, some of whom have experienced frequent changes in advisers, lack of strong personal connection with them and inadequate discipline-specific expertise.

It was noted that the staff in the [Center for College Student Success](#) (CCSS) used to provide four-year comprehensive advising for FLI and Odyssey students but that this model shifted in 2018. Some students familiar with the previous system believe that this change has been a loss for Odyssey Scholars and would like to see CCSS have a larger physical footprint on campus and expanded staffing.

The experience of international and undocumented students was briefly discussed. Students coming to UChicago from abroad faced many challenges last summer related to the pandemic and U.S. government immigration policies. According to some students, the University’s communications and outreach to international students was insufficient and not timely. The student group UChicago Without Borders also thinks that the University’s [resources](#) for undocumented students and those with DACA eligibility are insufficiently promoted across campus.

The final section of the discussion focused on philanthropy. The trustees were asked to share their thoughts on giving and what they would say to graduating students who may not be inclined to give to the College or University. Comments in response included appreciation for the work and leadership of the students present, who exemplify the source of inspiration that leads many alumni and donors to support the College by contributing to financial aid and student programs. New alumni are not expected to give large amounts, but it can be good to get in the habit of giving back and consider how even small gifts matter to those following in your footsteps. Philanthropy is largely about funding what matters to you, based on your experiences and values; there will always be a place to allocate your financial gift for those things you care most about. Other trustees remarked on the transformative nature of their UChicago education and its contribution to subsequent professional and personal success. The cost of providing a UChicago education exceeds the cost of tuition, so philanthropy is critical to helping to fill that gap. Additionally, philanthropy can help fund research and initiatives that have a significant impact on society and the world. (Universities are often the only places where such work can happen because of the unique nature of the scholarly community and the freedom of its members to pursue research that is not predicated on the need to make profits or align with a particular political or social perspective.) Starting early with giving is important – typically, a donor has a thirty-year history of philanthropy before making a major gift. Lastly, trustees give in gratitude

for the financial support they received that made attending UChicago possible. Philanthropy has also been crucial for making possible the many student supports that were non-existent twenty to thirty years ago.

The meeting ended with the students thanking the trustees for their time and expressing a desire to have more student-trustee connections in the future via meetings and access to Board meeting minutes. Dean of Students in the University Michele Rasmussen will share this request with the relevant University officers.

Mr. Klingensmith and the trustees thanked the students and the undergraduate and graduate liaisons, Itzel Velázquez Sánchez and Steven Wendeborn, for their service in the past academic year.



STUDENT PERSPECTIVES SERIES: SPRING 2021 MEMORANDUM

TO: Student Perspectives Series Trustees

FROM: Itzel Velázquez, Undergraduate Liaison to the Board of Trustees

DATE: May 12, 2021

SUBJECT: Strategic Themes and Question Prompts for the May 27, 2021 SPS Meeting

I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss student perspectives on undergraduate access to **UChicago opportunities and resources, and how to succeed during their undergraduate career and beyond.**

In advance of our meeting, I am proposing the following themes and question prompts for your consideration, which I hope can instigate a productive conversation:

1. Robust opportunities, yet limited understanding and capacity among some students: Despite being a world-renowned research institution and Career Advancement having endless opportunities, some students do not have a baseline understanding of how to get opportunities, especially those in financial need. Workload intensity and financial burdens can heavily impact students, making non-paid, for-credit research opportunities burdensome for some students even though those opportunities are intended to help them. Given your experience with the University, what realistic advice do you have for students who balance these responsibilities while maintaining involvement in organizations and maintaining a healthy social life?

2. Advice on addressing issues some students see as systemic problems at the University: Existing forms of administrative support can feel insufficient for some students in need financial support beyond tuition, fees, and supplies. Expenses for social activities – such as Uber rides with friends or spending \$20 on a meal – can be financially burdensome for some students. Further, calls to build cultural centers—a necessity for an increasingly diverse student body—are regularly stonewalled. The Center for College Student Success and the Center for Identity + Inclusion attempt to bridge this gap in support through programs and services such as free printing, textbook loans, and recreational space. However, these systemic shortcomings leave students to create their own support networks and cobble together a successful overall student experience. To create more equitable paths to success, what connections within or outside the institution do you think students should establish? What resources should they reach out to? And what administrative changes should the University make to close these support gaps?

3. Institutional support for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds: The way Trustees interact with students and alumni can impact their perception of UChicago. Admitted Student Receptions dazzle prospective students by placing the affluence of the University and its Trustees on full display. Once on campus, students note the high visibility of Trustees through personal interactions or named grants, scholarships, and House events. However, many undergraduates come to view such interfacing as nominal at best, feeling largely untouched by the advertised wealth of support and opportunities. This feeling lingers among some College alumni well after graduation, affecting willingness to contribute to University fundraising campaigns. Given Trustees' various engagements with students, how do you view your role in supporting students? And what might you say to alumni who have felt untouched by philanthropy and are reluctant to give back?

I look forward to learning how the Trustees' experience in their respective fields of expertise inform their opinions on these questions. Students selected to attend the meeting are excited to share their perspectives with the representatives from the Board. We appreciate the time and energy of all parties involved in making the last SPS meeting of this academic year a success, and I look forward to a productive conversation.



STUDENT LIAISONS TO THE BOARD 2020 – 2021

UNDERGRADUATE LIAISON: Itzel Velázquez Sánchez



Itzel is a fourth year in the College majoring in Neuroscience and Psychology. She is involved in teaching comprehensive health education with Peer Health Exchange, volunteering in the Emergency Department at UChicago Medicine, and is an author on publications in the Awh Vogel Lab, where she studies working memory and visual attention. She will be moving to New York to continue neuroimaging research at Columbia University, and later plans to continue to graduate school.

Outside of UChicago's rigorous academics, Itzel enjoys picnics along the lakefront, dancing, and finding new places to eat in Chicago.

GRADUATE LIAISON: Steven Wendeborn



Steven is a second-year student at the Booth School of Business and an alum of the College. As an undergraduate at UChicago, he majored in Economics and Law, Letters & Society and was a member of the Maroon Key Society, as well as a recipient of the Howell Murray Alumni Award. After graduation, Steven will join J.P. Morgan's investment banking division in New York as an associate in their Mergers & Acquisitions group.

Originally from Singapore, Steven has lived and worked in Seoul, Beijing, and Sydney in addition to Minnesota and New York. Outside of Booth, he enjoys open-water swimming, learning new languages, and travelling.



STUDENTS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ángel Rosales – Dallas, TX

Allen Abbott – Livermore, CA

Donna Son - Denton, TX

I am a second year in the College studying political science and French. I am involved in security research at the Chicago Project on Security and Threats, political journalism with The Gate, and student voter engagement initiatives with UChiVotes. As an Odyssey Scholar, I want to help provide equitable scholarly and professional opportunities for all students at UChicago - College and beyond.

Ella Bradford – Atlanta, GA

I am a third year in the College studying Anthropology and History. I co-lead Student Government's Health and Wellness Committee, tutor hospitalized children at our Comer Children's Hospital, and enjoy competing on my house's intermural teams. I have dedicated much of my undergraduate career to improving the wellbeing of students on campus, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on how I see UChicago could best support its students.

Joanna Zhang - Ottawa, Canada

I am a third year in the College studying Economics with a minor in Human Rights. I am involved in the Partnership for the Advancement of Refugee Rights, UChicago Without Borders, Phoenix Funds, and MUN. In participating in this discussion, I want to catalyze the process of protecting vulnerable students and minority groups at UChicago.

Myles Hudson – Atlanta, GA

Pablo Vicente – Chicago, IL

Parul Kumar – Arlington Heights, IL

I am a third year in the College studying Law, Letters, and Society. I am the incoming Undergraduate Student Government President, a co-President for Phoenix Survivors Alliance, a sexual assault advocacy group on campus, and the current President of Southside Scribblers, a community service RSO dedicated to teaching students at Ray Elementary about creative writing. I want to provide support for resources to aid all marginalized students on campus, but am particularly interested in support for survivors. I'm excited to come to this event to be able to hear from the members of the Board of Trustees what they plan to do to ensure marginalized students can thrive on our campus.

Youssef Hasweh – New York, NY