

Senate Executive Committee Meeting
Monday, December 9, 2019

In Attendance: Dinesh Pinisetty (Chair), Keir Moorhead (Vice Chair) [via Zoom], Sarah Senk (Secretary), Steve Brown, Margot Hanson, Elizabeth McNie, Cynthia Trevisan, Frank Yip + 6 cadets

I. Student Input: Campus Climate Issues

As a follow-up to the General Meeting of December 5, the Executive Committee invited cadets to speak with the committee and the Provost regarding concerns about campus climate. The students agreed to have their comments documented so long as they remained anonymous.

- Committee asks students to share their observations about campus culture, particularly regarding concerns about health and wellbeing
 - Cadet 1: notes in comparison to last year “a major tick-up in self-harm tendencies,” it’s very difficult when people come to you because people recognize it’s unhealthy, that they want to stop, but they’re very nervous because of misinformation on our campus around CAPS. A lot of licensed track cadet in particular think that if they go to therapy it will be noted on their record, and if it’s noted they think they won’t be able to get their license. Students acknowledge they’ve done it, but are scared to get the help they need through CAPS, or through speaking with professionals, so they go to RA staff, or AS, and the problem that creates is that it’s “them coming to us, and us as full time students already managing classes, and corps, and it creates a huge burden on all of us, and for those of us in leadership this semester it’s become a constant presence” / Academy is asking too much of student leadership to support their fellow cadets
 - Cadet 2: another point, in Upper Res, 3 of the 4 incidents have occurred at night or outside of CAPS working hours, so that meant that “our only mode of escalation was to pro staff, who are trained, but are not licensed medical professionals.” Sometimes it feels like if you call police services the response is going to be transport them to the hospital. But there’s a gray area, where someone doesn’t require immediate transport for a number of reasons, but you still don’t really trust them, and sometimes I would go to bed with the duty phone, but I’m not prepared to spend the whole night awake without support.
- Provost: Do you feel like you get enough training?
 - Cadet 3: I feel like we do get comprehensive training, but the one thing we need to be trained on a little bit more, is how to deal with people with suicidal ideations.” A lot of the students now say “why would I talk to someone about this if I know I could be transported without my consent to a hospital?” they need help but know that they might not want to go down that path. There’s a myth that services don’t want to see them, because they have trouble making appointments. In addition to mental health, the other issue is Title IX incidents. Reports are made, and the accused are still here. And women say, “Why am I going to report another incident, because the school isn’t going to do anything about it.”
 - Cadet 2: it feels like we need a 24/7 dedicated psychological team

- Provost: Do you have ideas about what can help you?
 - Cadet 4: In regards to training, I don't think there's a way to give us the time needed to address these issues. Most students don't realize that outside of school there are other resources. Eg. Safe by Solano. 24/7 suicide hotline. From my experience, upper-classmen put aside some of their mental health concerns because it's what needed. Those of us within marine and licensed track that's what's needed; seconds matter and you can't be distracted. But unfortunately, they put that away and never go back to it. I would like to disagree about thinking that it's going to be on our record; they just say "I'm good; nothing's wrong with me."
 - Cadet 5: I'd like to speak on the campus culture surrounding this. There's definitely two cultures inside Cal Maritime.
 - Cadet 6: It's just constant. I've heard suicide jokes constantly, and it's disturbing because you hear them from people you *know* have problems.

- Provost asks whether students think the problems are the result of high stress levels.
 - Cadet 5: a lot of the joke seem to stem from people's frustrations about having no time to take care of themselves

- Cadet 6: [reads email from another cadet about O Week]: "I was very close to leaving during O Week, but I know of many who left in the first week because they were misled. I wish it allowed for friend-making and not preparing for the military." Most people don't spend free time (if they have it) productively. Drinking alone, most people don't get to enjoy any time at college. One complaint a lot of people have is mirrored watches, where on Monday we might have an 8 AM exam after getting 5-6 hours of sleep every night for an entire weekend."

- Provost: Do you know why Mirrored watches happen?
 - Cadet 4: we don't have enough people to stand 4 on, 12 off. Upperclassmen since we have a high drop-out rate we lose a bunch of people. Engineer Watch is even more intense.
 - Cadet 2: part of it too is that a lot of upperclassmen have out of class obligations. (eg. tutor, RHO, training officer, etc.) you have a smaller pool as you get into the upper classes. You may have only one person in a cohort who can stand watch reliably.

- Yip: When you were freshmen, how much stress if you were unable to cover a watch? And what was obligation?
 - Cadet 2: all the stress came from trying to find a replacement. But once you get your support group in place, then it gets less stressful.
 - Cadet 5: we've always said in my division that academics come first, and as long as they coordinate

- Yip: I've heard stories of freshmen this semester having to do 5-6 watches. Are those substantiated?
 - Cadet 6: as a freshman I had 12-13 watches.
 - Provost asks *HOW does that happen?*

- Cadet 5: It's just how it's scheduled. You get a list.
 - Yip summarizes: "you have an XO who puts it up and says "figure it out" and some kid gets 8 watches and another gets 1."
 - Cadet 1: at least for MPM company we're trying to address that
 - Provost: What's the role of the commandants?
 - Cadets: No one really knows.
 - Cadet 2: we have an engine commandant, and no one would talk to him about anything regarding watches unless you got demerits for something. That's part of the campus climate. The only time you see Commandants is when you are in trouble. You never see a Commandant congratulate anybody. A lot of students have expressed to me that while they don't mind the academy aspect of the school, it's entirely cadet-based....
- Cadet 5: How it feels on the ground: "if you have any disagreement with them, you are not to say it to their face otherwise they will give you demerits for conduct unbecoming"
 - Cadet 1: coming from military background is a problem we have to deal with. Is this what the academy should be doing? It's for others to decide. But for the student body, that's not what we signed up for.
 - Provost: I would really encourage you to speak up. You are the reason this place exists. And it's really important to have that feedback. It really is important for you to speak up, and coming together as a group is absolutely the best way to do it. These things need to be said, and we do need to look at these for the future.
 - Cadet 3: There comes a time when the freshmen – mostly engineers. Freshmen MTs workload isn't bad. But with some of the ETs and MEs; they're taking more than 20 units their first semester of college. They don't realize how that is going to impact them and their stress levels. They talk about why their chemistry and calculus classes are so difficult and complain, but if you want to get your license and sail, it's expected that you graduate in 4 years. Sometimes there are people who can handle it just fine, but sometimes there are people who are struggling. Professors are there for us, and you guys know the stress that we're in, but it's not like you can just give us straight As.
 - Yip: I can say I know the stress, but at the time I took these classes I took 12 units, and I didn't have someone telling me I had to be on watch from 4-8 AM or I'm gonna get shitcanned. Thank you for regarding that the faculty are caring and trying to do their job. But everyone has a limit on stressors. I think by lack of coordination, the Commandants' office is pulling people into different directions.
 - Cadet 5: General feeling on campus climate is "We're stuck in this. There's no way out." The number of people who have told me "that's not gonna happen. There's no changing."
 - Cadet 2: They made engineering students get out paint and paint over my mural. And none of the ship staff wants it, no one painting the murals over wants it. And not knowing other than rumors that they were going to make us do it. I showed up to class one day and they were like, "Guess what you're doing today? You're painting over your murals."

- Cadet 5: Other thing I've seen is students bringing issues to the Commandants and then they just wait for them to graduate and then do nothing."
- Provost: are things worse this semester? And why?
 - Cadet 2: from my experience, what's worked is a "family feeling." I can speak for the group of juniors in my division. We went through everything together. All this time, every struggle and issue we were facing, we could communicate with each other. And to this day we stick together, and we haven't lost too many people." [acknowledges this is specific to this division] I think this is why we're seeing such an increase: people are isolated. [Why?] Housing: instead of grouping by division we're integrating with different majors and different companies, but the unfortunate thing is that you're not with them all the time and a lot of the times what we're experiencing it hasn't been working.
 - Cadet 5: RHO events happen, but a lot of students say "I can either do my homework... or..." It's clear the RHOs really care about trying to bring people together, but each individual is thinking "I've got this other thing I have to do," and that's just part of the campus culture.
 - Cadet 2: Even if you knock on everyone's door, the answer is "no I'm doing homework."
 - Cadet 3: a lot of females here have been harassed or had Title IX violations, but they won't say anything because of what's happened in the past.
 - Yip: Do you think this campus owes all of our student a functional Title IX structure?
 - Cadets: Yes.

II. Discussion (After cadets leave, the committee discussed actions we can take now to support student success)

- Provost asks whether Mirrored Watch is required for training as a test of endurance. Browne and McNie confirm no. Moorhead identifies that the main problem appears to be scheduling, points out that this didn't seem to be a problem when the school enrolled half as many students. Consensus is that we should start by evaluating how scheduling inequity is happening. It appears that as an institution "we've punted it to the cadets as a leadership/learning tool, and maybe it should have a lot more oversight. But from who?"
- Browne adds that every year new corps leadership takes over and new freshmen miss classes because of watch
- McNie highlights issues of equity: some students stand 12, some stand none because of job (eg. you get paid as being a tutor, paid as an RHO). Equity issues must be addressed.