

Syracuse University Senate Committee on Women's Concerns
2010-2011 Annual Report
Presented to the Syracuse University Senate February 15, 2012

There shall be a Committee on Women's Concerns which shall focus on the development, oversight, and monitoring of the many issues at Syracuse University which are central to the climate for women faculty members, administrators, staff members, and students. In particular, but not exclusively, the committee will concern itself with issues of curriculum, pay equity, affirmative action, sexual harassment, climate and advancement of women
[Faculty Senate Bylaws, Section 20]

I. 2010/2011 goals

- Focus attention on child and dependent care issues—in particular, concerns and issues surrounding the merger of the Early Education and Child Care Center (EECCC), effective July 1, 2010, with the then College of Human Ecology (now the Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics)
- Meet with Human Resources staff about the University's revised *Staff Complaint Process* launched in January 2003—including how the process has been working, any issues/problems identified
- Work more collaboratively with the Services to Faculty & Staff committee
- Follow the progress of the Senate's *Task Force on Complaint Procedure for Allegations of Inappropriate Conduct by Faculty*

II. Focus of 2010/11 activities

A. Activities concerning the merger of the Early Education and Child Care Center (EECCC)

The information below documents the committee's activities concerning the merger of the Early Education and Child Care Center (EECCC), effective July 1, 2010, with the then College of Human Ecology (now the Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics):

03/10/2010

The Senate Agenda Committee chair contacted Women's Concerns and Services to Faculty and Staff—the two Senate committees that have a particular interest in childcare services on campus—alerting them about a March 8, 2010 letter sent by SU EECCC parents to the Dean of the then College of Human Ecology and Dean, Division of Student Affairs about transitioning the EECCC from the Division of Student Affairs to the College of Human Ecology.

03/23/2010

Committee members discussed the EECCC parents' letter and decided that the next step for the committee would be to reach out to the EECCC director to see if she might want/feel comfortable talking with us about this situation.

04/28/2010

A committee co-chair met with the EECCC director, letting her know that the committee is a "safe place" within which to talk, that the committee understands it is a leap of faith for her to come to us to talk about a very difficult situation, that we understand that she is feeling nervous and vulnerable, and that we will be there to listen and to try to figure out what role our committee might play as a result of our talk with her.

05/04/2010

Committee members met with the EECCC chair, accompanied by a faculty member parent with a keen interest in daycare issues at SU.

05/27/2010

Committee members met with an individual who provided an update on the 05/25/2010 parents meeting with members of University administration and others to express parents' concerns about the ongoing transition and to discuss ways for moving forward. The individual reported to committee members that parents who attended the 05/25/2010 meeting learned that:

- The transition of the EECCC from Student Affairs to Human Ecology will happen on July 1, 2010
- There will be no significant changes during the first year of the transition (parent sought clarity on the meaning of "significant changes")
- The focus of the first year of transitions will be guiding good working relationships
- Senior Vice-President Kal Alston will be available to help facilitate the transition process
- The Vice-Chancellor has filled the Chancellor in on the situation
- The Vice-Chancellor's goal is to "fix the process", using the EECCC transition committee, which will be chaired by the EECCC director

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was felt by parents that there was forward progress, and that there seemed to be a possibility for "getting things back on track" or at least moving in the direction of rebuilding the working relationships that will be necessary for the center to continue to thrive under Human Ecology's direction.

Following this update, committee members brainstormed some possible next steps, including:

- Writing a letter to Vice-Chancellor Spina in the spirit of the committee representing key stakeholders involved in childcare issues on campus
- Inviting the Vice-Chancellor to a meeting to ask questions/get clarification about various issues surrounding the situation
- Updating the chair of the Senate Agenda Committee on the Committee's activities and concerns about the EECCC transition, as well as seek advice about and suggestions concerning possible next steps that might be productive for the committee to take.

Committee members deliberated and suggested that the co-chairs contact the Senate Agenda Committee chair as a next step.

05/28/2011

Committee co-chairs "met" via telephone with the chair of the Senate Agenda Committee, who suggested that the committee:

- Hold off on meeting with the Vice-Chancellor or Dean of Human Ecology, since the initial crucial meetings have been held—such a meeting might "cloud the issue"
- Watch what develops over the summer and early fall (2010)
- Maintain interaction with parents and daycare staff
- Include in next year's senate report a section with our interest, findings, and suggestions if appropriate on this important topic Include in next year's senate report a section that reports the committee has been looking at this situation, etc.
- Contact her if the committee becomes aware that there is a breakdown with the transition committee, an impasse, etc. It is at that point that she would advocate for the committee "coming to the table" as part of the conversation

07/20/2011

Co-chairs convened a special meeting to bring committee members up to date on issues heating up related to the EECCC transition, evidenced by a storm of emails to and from EECCC parents, including expressions of parents' concerns about the transition process over the past 18 months, draft parents' petitions, responses from University administration—all happening within the brief span of time between 07/05/2011 - 07/25/2011. Committee members were given permission to read these emails, and the Addendum below (pp. 5-6) provides a brief overview of the general themes that emerged from them.

Epilogue

On 12/13/2011, the committee's co-chairs met with Chancellor Cantor concerning the future of child care at Syracuse University. In particular, the co-chairs came to the meeting as advocates for presenting the

concerns aired and ideas offered by the parents of children enrolled in the University's EECCC. At this meeting, the co-chairs asserted the following—it was clear from the many parents' emails read by the committee that:

1. The transition (effective July 1, 2010) of the EECCC from the Division of Student Affairs to the then College of Human Ecology was a process that lacked transparency and collaboration with the EECCC staff and families—in short, that this was a process that went horribly wrong
2. The way in which that transition was handled eroded faculty and staff parents' trust in how issues of child care will be handled by the University in the future
3. To move forward successfully on planning for the future of child care at Syracuse University will require a process far different than that which transpired over the past two years

In addition, the co-chairs shared with the chancellor suggestions for moving forward offered by the EECCC parents during the stressful months of summer 2011. As the situation was unfolding, their voices urged University Administration to:

1. Engage them with transparency of process, cooperation with planning, and communication all around as the University moved forward on child care facility expansion
2. Consider alternative organizational structures for the EECCC, including transferring the EECCC out of an academic college and having it report to a campus-wide administrative unit that is responsible to the whole campus
3. Create an oversight board or governing body for the EECCC to uphold the quality, integrity, and stability of the EECCC in the midst of the childcare facility expansion. This oversight group should be composed of center employees, parents, and members of the Senate Committees (Women's Concerns, Services to Faculty and Staff, Student Life) with a vested stake in the future of the EECCC
4. Form a parent oversight group to oversee ALL childcare at SU—i.e., “institutionalize” a parental voice in key decisions regarding the Center's future
5. Convene the *Childcare Committee/Task Force* (referred to by Kal Alston in various emails) in the University Senate in conjunction with three Senate Committees—Women's Concerns, Services to Faculty and Staff, and the Student Life Committee (and other committees with an interest), plus parent representatives (who are in the Senate or not in the Senate). An independent chair, preferably a parent, should be chosen—one that is not hand-picked by the administration. The idea is fold this body into the governing processes of the university and provoke a dialogue in the University Senate

The co-chairs urged the chancellor to work on restoring the trust of our faculty, staff, and student parents/colleagues concerning the planning process for the future of child care at Syracuse University by:

1. Demonstrating transparency of process by such actions as the ongoing sharing of current details/plans for child care expansion with our campus community—EECCC staff, parents, and others about the nature of the center's expansion.
2. Demonstrating cooperation with EECCC staff and parents by such actions as involving them with the design and the decision-making process. Such actions will underscore the legitimacy of decisions made and confirm the University's respect for the potential and value of their expertise, voice, contribution and ownership of the process
3. Demonstrating communication to the campus community by such actions as:
 - a. Expediting the distribution and discussion of the University-wide *Dependent Care Task Force* final report submitted in May 2011, using the University Senate as the venue for such a discussion.
 - b. Expediting the establishment of the campus-wide *Childcare Committee/Task Force* on child care called for in the University's *Dependent Care Task Force* (2010-2011) report submitted in May 2011

- c. Holding a series of on-campus public town meetings about the future of child care at Syracuse University. These town meetings will provide the EECCC parents, as well as concerned University faculty and staff, with the opportunity to respond to initiatives in place so far, future initiatives planned, and to air their suggestions, concerns, etc. about the future of child care at Syracuse University.

B. For consideration by the University Senate:

1. Parents and other members of the University community need to know and be part of what the future of child care will be at Syracuse University. How do we ensure that faculty and staff will have a voice in child care developments on campus, thereby collectively determining the future of child care at Syracuse University?
2. An open, democratic, participative discussion did not occur during the EECCC/Falk College transition process. One of the problems is that the process took place outside of and not in consultation with our main academic governing body--the University Senate. How can such a situation be prevented in the future?

III. Other FY 2010/11 committee activities

A. Other activities concerning child and dependent care

On 10/21/2010, Committee members attended a meeting of the *University's Dependent Care Task Force* for an update of the Task Force's activities, as well as to offer committee members' concerns and perspectives on issues about dependent care—particularly day care. The Task force was created as one of the follow-up initiatives of the Chancellor's Report on Sustainable Benefits (01/22/2010), and charged to a specific plan for an initiative to "increase the subsidization of, and access to, dependent care

B. Prior initiative(s) concluded:

At the conclusion of FY 10/11, the committee decided to end its four-year consideration of establishing a women's center at Syracuse University. Response rates from the faculty/staff survey (launched 04/21/2008) and student survey (launched 01/ 28/2009) were too low for the Committee to validate a high level of need and/or desire for a women's center at Syracuse University. The response rate for completed faculty/staff surveys was 22% of the 3,189 sample, and the student survey response rate was 15% of the 4,500 sample.

C. Consideration of the role and function of the Women's Concerns Committee

During Spring 2011, the Committee became aware that at least four members were stepping off the committee (including the co-chairs), a situation which prompted a special meeting during the summer to discuss succession planning, the sparse attendance at meetings during 2010/11, and clarify committee members' views, concerns, and suggestions about the committee's current and future role/function within the University Senate. One observation resulting from this conversation was that a particular value of the Women's Concerns Committee continues to provide an important campus voice, and has been one of the few committees solicited for feedback concerning recent University initiatives (e.g. the *Task Force on Sustainable Benefits*, the *Senate Task Force on Complaint Procedure for Allegations of Inappropriate Conduct by Faculty Members*).

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Brown and Martha Hanson
Co-chairs, Senate Committee on Women's Concerns

Addendum

General Themes from the July 2011 Parents' Emails About the EECCC Transition Process (From the July 2011 Emails)

1. Lack of transparency—parents wrote:

- There was a consistent lack of transparency and unwillingness to listen to the concerns of teachers and parents.
- They felt that at every turn in this process there was at best little transparency and at worst disrespect by Falk College administrators and faculty towards EECCC staff and towards parents (themselves SU faculty, students, department chairs, administrators, and directors).
- The EECCC staff and parents called many times for collaboration and for respect for the existing vision of the center. Despite repeated promises from Falk College of transparency and a willingness to collaborate, parents were met instead with indifference, secrecy, condescension and, at times, outright hostility.
- They were assured that this process would get better and that the EECCC staff would not be harmed—as they are the backbone and the real spirit of excellence at the center.
- The transition process left them with a lack of confidence in the center's future and no confidence in the quality of the center's program moving forward.

2. Ineffective communication—parents wrote:

- It was a miserable transition process consisting of convoluted communication. They were granted very few public meetings, and a steering committee charged with ensuring a smooth transition failed due to a lack of Falk College leadership, interest, and commitment.
- It seemed that parents' objections were either misunderstood or misconstrued by administrators. Parents' objections were not to change or growth of the EECCC, but rather to the way the transition process was being handled.
- One communication appeared to suggest that the parents were somehow opposed to expansion and wanted the center to remain small and exclusive. They did not oppose the idea of having more children benefit from the EECCC; rather, they were urging the University to use the center staff's expertise, experience, and input to assist with the expansion, rather than having the Falk College administration dictate the terms of the expansion without involving the current staff.
- The suggestion that parents were acting only out of their own self-interest was made multiple times throughout the last year. This accusation was not only insulting, but it allowed the accuser to disregard the parents' view rather than hear it.
- The overriding concerns of parents were to maintain staff continuity, ensure that the staff is treated with respect, and to preserve the center's wonderful curriculum, particularly at the preschool level. The process was a failure on all fronts.
- Falk College could have moderated parents' personal fears—parents wondered why there were no intimate meetings with the staff and parents; why there was no mention of academic models in the discussion; why there was no satisfactory discourse with the main teachers at the school; why they did not initiate more public discussions if they felt that the staff and the director were resistant to change.
- Throughout the transition process there was no indication of how the existing philosophy of the center will change.

3. Ideas for alternative organizational structures/processes—parents suggested:

- There were a number of steps that could be taken to make a horrible situation move in a better direction: 1) senior administration could extend sincere gratitude to the staff that is leaving for their remarkable service to the SU community, 2) the EECCC could move back out of an academic college, and 3) a parent oversight group could be formed to oversee all childcare at SU.
- That EECCC report to a campus-wide administrative responsible to the whole campus unit, rather than to a single academic college.
- Creating an oversight Board or governing body for the EECCC composed of center employees, parents, and members of the Senate Committees (Women's Concerns, Services to Faculty and Staff, Student Life) with a vested stake in the future of the EECCC. The governing body will see that the quality, integrity, and stability of the EECCC are upheld in the midst of the childcare facility expansion.
- Convening the *Childcare Committee/Task Force* in the University Senate in order to fold this body into the governing processes of the university and provoke a dialogue in the University Senate. The committee could present its report on the floor of the Senate for discussion, debate, and approval. One of the problems all along is that the process took place outside of and not in consultation with our main academic governing body--the University Senate.

4. Calls for transparency, cooperation, and effective communication: parents wrote:

- They need to stress a certain level of transparency in the management of the center that has been lacking for the last 18 months, and called for a much more transparent and cooperative communication process going forward.
- That there are issues left unresolved and principles to advocate for—if they want to shape the future, they are going to have to continue to be visible and audible.
- At the very least, they want assurances that moving forward, parents will have significant input into issues such as staffing, curriculum, and maintenance of appropriate teacher-student ratios.