School of Education Dean’s Student Advisory Board
Summary by Dean Jeff Hamm

In spring, 2011, School of Education Dean Julie Underwood requested that the Associated Students of Madison (ASM) shared governance staff appoint members of a School of Education Student Advisory Board for the 2011-12 academic year. Board members would broadly represent the School’s academic programs and student groups; advise the Dean on various questions and issues; offer feedback on general student concerns; and represent the School administration to ASM and the School of Education student body.

Fifteen students, a mix of undergraduates and graduate students, were appointed to the inaugural board. The group met every few weeks during the school year. Themes that emerged over the 2011-12 academic year included the following:

- **Student Representation.** The board reviewed the list of School of Education committees and councils, their charges, and current composition. Several committees were identified as being represented by ASM appointees, while others were highlighted for possible student participation. A student was named to represent the Board at the monthly Administrative Council/Academic Planning Council meeting. At Dean Underwood’s initiative, the School’s Administrative Council voted to include a student voting member from the Student Advisory Board. Other committees indicated interest in and began to incorporate student representation.

- **“Educational Innovation.”** In December the group spent significant time discussing potential educational innovations. Student suggestions fell into three distinct categories:
  - Course evaluations during the semester for improved teaching and learning.
  - Course offering, including changing the structure of summer sessions, offering courses during winter break and weekends, and offering more undergraduate courses in the evening.
  - Course delivery: Facilitate study abroad for students taking fixed professional programs; increase the number of “hybrid courses” (part online, part face-to-face); offer online discussion sessions; use functions such as the “chat box” in Learn@UW.

- **Teaching evaluations.** This topic surfaced early with the board, but particularly in response to the Dean’s request for student thoughts about “Educational Innovation.” In February the board met with Jim Wollack and Julie Gorski from Testing and Evaluation to discuss teaching evaluations in general and mid-semester evaluations in particular. The students noted the importance of mid-term evaluations for improving classroom teaching and learning. Jim and Julie reported that, from their experience, few departments conducted mid-semester evaluations. Dean Underwood encouraged board members to bring this to the Academic Planning Council for consideration, which they did in spring. The board agreed that this should be a continuing effort for 2012-13.

- **Communication with students.** Staff got advice from the board on possible ways to communicate more effectively with students (especially undergraduates) in the School. Students indicated that the key was to communicate “from all angles: the more angles, the better.” This included email, Facebook, websites, and even the electronic boards in the building. One promising idea was to create something analogous to the “Graduate Student Collaborative” (GSC) newsletter, a joint project of students and the Graduate School.

Board members Tola Ewers and Ema Heimerl presented to the School of Education Administrative Council (deans, chairs, and directors) on April 11, 2012. They shared suggestions the board had generated
regarding educational innovations, including expanded timetable and course opportunities, increased course delivery using existing technology and hybrid models (online and face-to-face), and institution of low-stakes mid-term course evaluations for instructors.

Available board members also had lunch with the School of Education’s Board of Visitors in May, at which time Tola and Ema shared their Administrative Council presentation. The Board of Visitors agreed that the exchange was extremely valuable and encouraged Dean Underwood to arrange this again next year if possible.

At its last meeting in early May, the Student Advisory Board recommended that the 2012-13 board consider taking up the following topics (some of which had not surfaced in previous discussions):

1. *Technology in the curriculum.* Students noted that their instructors were not generally adept with technology and did not use it very effectively in their teaching. This was especially problematic for students in teacher education programs, who believed that they were subsequently not well prepared to use technology in their own teaching. Most of the students suggested that getting everybody up to speed with instructional technology would benefit the School broadly. Course work for students during the new winterim term could be especially valuable.

2. *Student orientation.* Board members argued that departments and the School were not very proactive in helping students connect with and learn from each other. A phrase that was used—by and about graduate students in particular—was “cousins that don’t talk.” The departmental boundaries seem to be particularly high for these students. Board members described ideal orientations that were “taken over by students themselves” and were “driven by student needs,” with students talking to students. Learning about campus resources from other students was highlighted particularly. One Board member reported that ELPA’s LEADS student group sponsored social activities that permitted students to meet and bond. Another member described department orientations in C&I that facilitated sharing of information and informal knowledge. Pairing new and experienced students could be another model.

3. *Mid-term evaluations.* The board spent substantial time discussing mid-term course evaluations during academic year 2011-12. If possible, these deliberations and actions should move forward.

4. *Cultural Competence.* This seemed to be a brand new topic for the board. Members expressed interest in better understanding what was being taught and what students were learning in this area. The major suggestion was for board members to share briefly their own experiences in programs around cultural competence.