Listening and Responding to Diverse Students:

Examples from the SCCD

(Science Center Committee on Diversity)

- by the Committee Members -

Who are we?

- Self-selected group of mainly DivIII
  - Students (~5-7)
  - staff and faculty (~15-20)
- Representing
  - student organizations
  - administrative units
  - academic departments and programs

https://www.smith.edu/aemes/leaders_sccd.php

What do we do?

- Initiate & support programming to increase diversity and promote education on issues of inclusion and equity in STEM

- Support:
  - AEMES (e.g. AEMES Scholars, Peer Mentoring, Early Research and McKinley Honors Fellowships, Posse)
  - Activities within student groups, such as:
    - US^2 (Union of Underrepresented Students in the Sciences)
    - MAPS (Minority Association of Prehealth Students)

Why?

- Effective programs increase underrepresented and first-generation student participation in the sciences (e.g. Katz et al., 2016)
- Goals:
  - Create an inclusive environment
  - Transform pedagogical practices in STEM
  - Enable students to achieve excellence early in their time at Smith

How?

- Make policy recommendations to the College (e.g., changes to decennial review process, rethink registration block for students with financial holds, etc.)

- Invite speakers to further our understanding of issues of equity and inclusion

- Organize events and share findings on pedagogy (e.g., Sigma Xi, Teaching Arts lunches, etc.)

- Host listening sessions with students

Listening Sessions

- Initiated 4 years ago

- Invited student group leaders (e.g., BSA, *Nosotros*, F1GS, EKTA), AEMES community (students mentors and mentees), and all DivIII students

- Expanded last year to individual departments and programs

- Compilation of detailed notes ([an example from 2016-17](#)) - used for SCCD agenda setting and action items

Opportunities and Challenges

- Hear directly from the students

- Respond to their concerns

- Create an environment of inclusion, trust and respect

- Share information broadly within and beyond DivIII

Examples of Resulting Changes

- Within individual departments/programs:
  - ES&P started a lunch-bag
  - GEO is diversifying luncheon speaker profiles
  - BIO is renumbering course sequence for easier navigation
  - Chemistry expanded tutoring to include advanced courses
  - Astronomy is counting more courses towards their major
  - Physics provides free texts to students and trains learning assistants in issues of access/inclusion

Examples of Resulting Changes

- Overall:
  - Engaged in discussions on how to avoid misgendering students (particularly in large lectures)
  - Created more research opportunities for students
  - Successful policy proposals:
    - Include data on access/inclusion in decennial reviews
    - Collect data on work in this area on FRS
    - Revise GPA calculation for students who retake courses

Reflections by student SCCD members

- **We feel accomplished with policy changes**
  - Restructuring the ability to re-take courses
- **We want to continue working on**
  - Revisions to the S/U grading policy
- **We feel empowered by**
  - The ability to "invite other students to the table"

Reflections by student SCCD members

- Provided me the opportunity to talk about my experience at Smith as a student with learning disabilities
- Allows students to voice their concerns without being negatively impacted by their professors
- Students may be hesitant to tell professors about difficulties because while professors may say that they are willing to work with students, they may have restrictive office hours, may not offer extensions, or be hard to reach through email

Going Forward

- Continue to increase frequency and diversify the format of listening sessions

- Continue to develop a "best practices" manual to highlight what students report are most helpful pedagogical practices they have encountered in STEM courses

SCCD Guide to Best Practices, with focus on large enrollment STEM classes

INTRODUCTION:
For the past four years, SCCD has been holding annual listening sessions with students. These sessions provide an opportunity to both hear about challenges/barriers and to learn about best practices. As a result, we have been able to collect examples of some of the best practices from across the curriculum.

The guide is a 'living document' that belongs to all of us, and we invite you to update, edit and improve as extensively and as often as you can.

TOPICS:
- Tutoring
- Support for new students navigating STEM majors
- Office hours
- Grading practices
- Meeting diverse learning styles, including documented disabilities
- Study groups

Going Forward

- Continue to increase frequency and diversify the format of listening sessions

- Continue to develop a "best practices" manual to highlight what students report are most helpful pedagogical practices they have encountered in STEM courses

- We invite your questions and comments!

Thank you!