

# ASG hears CPDC, Middle States updates at GA

Sami Mirza, Editor-in-Chief | October 5, 2022



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Sami Mirza

Interim Dean of Students Trae Yeckley speaks to ASG about the current status of the Counseling and Personal Development Center during the General Assembly on Tuesday, Oct. 4.

The Allegheny Student Government heard updates regarding the Counseling and Personal Development Center and the college's reaccreditation process and swore in two new senators at their General Assembly on the evening of Tuesday, Oct. 4.

Interim Dean of Students Trae Yeckley, presenting as the Associate Dean of Students for Community Standards and Wellness, informed ASG that two counselors — including CPDC Director Danielle Pecar — had left the college in recent months. Yeckley said that the CPDC's caseload of around 100 students is now split between the remaining two counselors.



“If someone sends a request for counseling services, they are about two weeks out from actually being able to get into counseling services,” Yeckley said. “Much further than that, and we will go to a waitlist, but we’re not there yet, and once we get closer to that, I will let (the ASG) cabinet know.”

If the CPDC does go to a waitlist, Yeckley said the plan is to ease counselors’ case loads by bringing in off-campus counselors for group sessions and instituting drop-in hours for students to get a single session of counseling without needing to be scheduled in.

“My hope is to not make it to a waitlist,” Yeckley said. “However, I also realized that two counselors carrying a caseload of about 50 students is really difficult and it can start impacting the work that they’re doing ... I don’t want to burn out our two counselors, so we’re walking that line between how we retain the counselors that we already have and provide services to students.”

Yeckley noted that the CPDC has already taken steps to reduce caseload by providing group sessions, including a Monday evening group for Black, Indigenous and students of color run by an external counselor from Erie.

In an interview after the GA, Yeckley said the current caseload is slightly lower than usual due to a lower enrollment and new hires in the Maytum Center for Student Success.

“I think also the role of the class deans has started to serve some of the case management stuff that the counseling center used to help out with,” Yeckley said. “Students coming in and having questions about study skills and presentations, (the CPDC) would see that because students would consider that anxiety — and there’s some anxiety with that, but we are seeing more students going to the class deans for academic work.”

Yeckley called the college counseling profession a “high reward but also a high-pressure job,” and noted that those higher pressures can lead to rapid turnover not just at Allegheny but across the country. A 2020-21 survey conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors found that 70% of responding centers had difficulty recruiting for one or more open positions.

The counselors that did leave, Yeckley said, did so with no ill will.

“Our director (Pecar) who left, she was offered her dream position at a different institution, and I supported her in leaving because I think it was the right move for her,” Yeckley said. “She loved Allegheny, she loved the students, she loved living in Meadville and it was her dream job, so I was like, ‘alright, go ahead.’”

In filling these roles, Yeckley said that the hiring focus for the CPDC is not to snap up the first candidate that walks in the door.

“We’re not just going to hire someone because they are available and have the minimum requirements,” Yeckley said. “We would rather have a waitlist than have the wrong person in

the seat, have someone come in that says, 'Yeah, I can work with BIPOC populations,' and actually has never worked with BIPOC student populations, or has never had the appropriate training to work with BIPOC student populations."

Studies — including an eight-year survey published in 2022 by the Healthy Minds Network — have shown that the prevalence of mental health issues among BIPOC students is growing faster than those same students' use of mental health services.

Thus, Yeckley wants all CPDC staff to be able to engage with marginalized groups, rather than hiring and overbooking a single specialist as the sole person capable of responding to the needs of Allegheny's BIPOC population.

"If there is a high-need student coming in and that high-need student, ... only wants to see the counselor that specializes in BIPOC populations, but that counselor is at waitlist and the other ones aren't, we want to make sure that all of our counselors are able to treat the student in front of them ethically and appropriately, regardless of their of background," Yeckley said.

In the meantime, Yeckley encouraged students to call the 24/7 hotline — (814)332-2105 — during emergencies and to reach out to themselves or the CPDC itself if they need support.

The GA also heard from Associate Provost Jennifer Dearden and Professor of History and Global Health professor Kenneth Pinnow in their capacities as co-chairs of Allegheny's reaccreditation committee with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Dearden and Pinnow explained that the initial draft of their self-study report is now available for the college community to view and provide feedback on.

"If you're wondering how this institution works and why things are the way they are, this is a way for you to learn a bit about the institution," Pinnow told ASG in the meeting. "It covers the last 10 years of the institutions, so a little bit of history in there, a little bit of understanding why we do things the way we do. Ultimately, it's to help us set the foundation for future change. So it's not a strategic plan; this is a kind of a self-analysis of what we do well, where we can be better and kind of setting up some recommendations (going forward)."

Students, faculty and staff can provide feedback on the report through a Google Form on the college website. Dearden said both the form and the draft report will be sent to students via email a few days after the assembly.

The feedback form will close on Friday, Oct. 14, to give Dearden and Pinnow time to incorporate the feedback ahead of the Nov. 8-9 preliminary visit by President of New Jersey's St. Elizabeth University Gary Crosby.

Crosby will be representing MSCHE as the External Team Chair. A larger evaluation team is set to visit the college in the spring of 2023 after the self-study report is completed and submitted.

In addition to hearing from guest speakers, the Senate approved a total of \$1,610 in finance requests — \$1,050 from the General Fund for the Islamic Cultural Association, Orchesis and

Union Latinx, \$110 from the Surplus Fund for AGES and \$450 from the CILC Fund for Allegheny Hillel and the Association of Caribbean Students.

ASG President Veronica Green swore in two new Senators: Truong Son Nguyen, '23, and Harrison Seabold, '23. Additionally, Class of 2026 President Sam Ault announced that their class had selected insert name and class year here as a fifth Senator to complete the first-year Senate delegation, though the new Senator was unable to attend the GA that evening.

With these new appointments, the Senate is short just three representatives, all of which are for the Class of 2024.

Chief of Staff Ray Colabawalla, '25, also presented a pair of nominees for the College Committee Council, both of whom were approved unanimously as a slate. Fenn Kathman, '23, was appointed to the Council on Diversity and Equity, and Kyra Jordan, '25, was appointed to the Finance and Facilities Committee.

All of this business was conducted without ASG Vice President Rudra Schultz-Ray, '23, and ASG Director of Communications and Press Kyrié Doniz, '23. Last week, the body was missing Director of Community Relations Will Lowthert, '23, and Director of Organizational Development Kori Bower, '23, though the latter two returned this week.

“(Doniz) was not here tonight because of personal reasons,” Green said. “(Schultz-Ray) has been sick for a little bit but they have been getting tested and it is not coming up (as) COVID. Same with (Lowthert) and (Bower). I think it’s just the ‘Gheny plague going around.”

Doniz’s absence left the GA without a Facebook livestream, though Green said that the stream should return when Doniz does.

ASG voted to cancel their GA on Tuesday, Oct. 11, due to Fall Break. The next GA is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 18, at 7:30 pm in room 301/302 of the Henderson Campus Center.

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## About the Contributor



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Sami Mirza is a junior from many different places. He is majoring in International Studies with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa and minor in...

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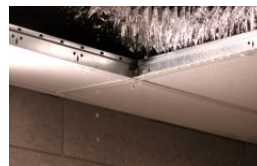
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