

Truman hosts professional SA conference

Mandi Sagez
for the Index

It brought together a group of leaders motivated enough to spend Saturday learning how to improve their methods.

"The Heartland Conference is an SA/RA conference that's geared towards residence life and the leaders who represent each campus," said senior Twink Pham, conference co-chairwoman. "It's an opportunity for professional development."

Truman hosted the second annual Heartland Conference.

Pham said the point of the conference is professional development. The conference covered four areas of focus including how to take care of oneself as a student adviser or resident and how an adviser can take care of his or her residents, she said.

The conference originally started as a bid for the Mid-West Affiliate of College and University Residence Halls conference, Pham said.

"We had a large group of people that went together, and we built this big, big package and presented it in February 2004," Pham said.

She said Truman was not chosen to host the conference, so under the direction of last year's co-chairpersons, they reshaped the conference.

"We made it a brand new conference: the Heartland Conference," Pham said. "It was a lot of work, really stressful, but I think that we made this really great new thing, and hopefully it will continue to grow."

The entire staff worked on the conference for a year, she said.

"We knew we were going to be having [the conference] again, so we had applications in the spring, and people have been working on it ever since then," Pham said.

She said that a different set of schools attended the conference, making up the 80 to 90 delegates.

"It's really small and intimate, and that makes it a good conference atmosphere," Pham said. "I like how it is a smaller group, and so you get to know everybody."

The theme for the conference was "Developing Your Masterpiece: Leading Outside the Lines," she said.

"The kids from the elementary school drew pictures for us, and they're going to be our decorations, their little masterpieces," Pham said. "That will be really cute."

The conference consisted of 16 to 20 programs and roundtables for the delegates to attend, learn skills and share ideas, Pham said.

"Especially since we're all from different campuses, we get some tips from other RAs, things that they do, things that we do," she said.

Area Coordinator John Mounsey, one of the conference advisers, said there are some other student conferences meant for student growth opportunities.

"We really wanted to take this conference and turn it into something a little bit more professional, as kind of a stepping stone from those student conferences and the professional realm of Residence Life," he said.

Mounsey said one addition to the conference was mock situations SA's might experience.

"We have an experiential component, which is pretty similar to what we do in our [SA] training," Mounsey said. "The SAs get an opportunity to mock situations, responding to crises of one sort or another."

He said that after Truman wasn't chosen to host the MACURH conference

"It's really small and intimate, and that makes it a good conference atmosphere."

Twink Pham
Senior



Courtney Robbins/Index

Two students walk by a sidewalk adorned with thank you notes from participants of the Heartland Conference that took place on Campus last weekend.

because of limited hotel facilities, they didn't want to throw away all the work they had done.

"We did so with the intention that we would host it for two years, and then it would become a roaming conference," Mounsey said. "Northwest [Missouri

State University] bid for it next year, so they will host it next year."

Sophomore Whitney Watson, a conference delegate from Missouri Western State University, said this was her first year at the conference.

"This is my first semester as an RA,

and I wanted to learn a few more leadership skills," she said.

Watson said she liked the sessions on programming.

"We talked about how to advertise to have more people attend [the programs]," she said.

Professors' classes will swell after increase of ratio

Emily Finnegan
For the Index

Sixteen does not always equal 16.

Last month the University administrators raised the student-to-faculty ratio to 16-to-1.

What most people do not realize, however, is that 16-to-1 does not mean 16 students per each faculty member.

"The 16-to-1 ratio is not for every discipline, and the targets will take in to account how each discipline functions — some will be less than 16, some will be more than 16, and some will be right at 16," said Michael McManis, dean for University planning and institutional development and executive assistant to the president. "The goal is a university wide ratio of 16-to-1, and the differences are in the process of being negotiated between the vice president for academic affairs and deans of the divisions with eventual input from faculty."

The increase in the ratio actually will require each faculty member teaching three three-credit hour courses to have 27 students in each class. This game of numbers is currently the focus of one Undergraduate Council committee examining large class sizes. It will report its recommendations of general guidelines to consider when setting class sizes by next March.

The full-time equivalent student-to-faculty, or FTE, ratio is calculated using a standard higher-education industry formula, said McManis.

Each division varies slightly on how it

defines full-time equivalent faculty, McManis said. Science is based on the number of contact hours a faculty member has with students while social science uses the three three-credit hour classes definition, he said.

The 16-to-1 ratio is nothing new for Truman. The University used the same ratio in the mid-to-late 1990s.

"We know Truman was a very good institution in 1996, 1997, 1998 when we operated at 16-to-1, and there's no reason we can't continue to do that," McManis said. "We've been there already. You're really talking about a small number of additional students in classes, and that shouldn't result in wholesale changes in how we do business."

The balancing act is complicated because the standard used in the formula is not applicable across all disciplines and classes.

Some classes cannot have 27 students, like private lessons in the music department, Undergraduate Council Chairman Scott Alberts, said. Other classes, like lifetime health and fitness, already work with more than 27 students, he said.

Alberts said the change in the FTE ratio means that on average, three more students would need to be added to each class. Since upper-level classes cannot have three students added arbitrarily, lower-level classes probably would have to be raised by five or six more students, he said.

The Undergraduate Council committee on large classes was asked if a few classes could handle being increased to more than 40 or 60 students.

"It's a committee that's looking for broad

symptoms of when can a class be successful if it's bigger," Alberts said. "We already do it with lifetime health and a few sections of intro psychology. If we really think that it's just horribly wrong to do, then we should quit doing it there."

The UGC committee also is looking at what kinds of things can be done to make large classes successful for both students and faculty, Alberts said.

"It's one of those funny things that's part a pedagogy education/teaching method decision and part a money decision," he said. "On the one hand, we wouldn't want the money to determine our class sizes, but at the same time, if we can't afford to do what we're doing, we have to figure it out."

The UGC committee is examining what other schools do, talking to faculty and analyzing data on class sizes. The final decision on how to balance the numbers rests with each division, Alberts said.

Space also must be considered. The addition of two classrooms in Magruder Hall that can accommodate more than 70 students will help, but facilities will need to be managed carefully and shared between disciplines because few classrooms on campus can hold classes of more than 30, Alberts said.

"We want to do it in a thoughtful, meaningful way rather than letting the money make us do things," he said.

Melody Jennings, health and exercise science instructor, has seen Truman's numbers fluctuate for many years. Jennings received her undergraduate degree from Northeast Missouri State University and has taught at Truman since 1984.

Jennings said that during the last 10 years, her health classes consistently had

Formula for Student to Faculty Ratio *

$$\left(\frac{\text{(Undergraduate credit hours/year)}}{30} + \frac{\text{(Graduate credit hours/year)}}{24} \right)$$

(number of full-time faculty)

* Formula for Language and Literature & Social Science divisions. This differs by division.

Design by Victoria Weaver/Index

an enrollment of 100 students. Large classes can be used for health, but there is a downside, she said.

"There's a big difference in me getting to know the students," Jennings said. "That's the one big drawback, that I don't get a lot of personal interaction with the students."

New approaches are being used to make large classes more effective for students. The human potential and performance division now uses the Classroom Performance System, to allow students to take tests electronically. Instructors also can use the technology to make discussions more personal and class more interactive for students by conducting surveys in class and generating results immediately, Jennings said.

She said large classes can work but should be approached with caution.

"We need to personalize our instruction and meet the needs of our students and unless you get the chance to know them, how

can we do that?" Jennings said.

Sophomore Cathy Caruthers said she thinks the success of large classes depends largely on the professor. Caruthers is enrolled in General Psychology with Sal Costa, assistant professor of psychology and has taken other large classes in the past.

"I think Sal is good at incorporating all the students in the conversation because he asks a lot of questions, so there is a lot of participation," she said. "But I took biology last year with 40 kids in it, and I thought that was hard. It was hard to ask questions and kind of intimidating in a class that big."

Caruthers said she worries about the increase and what it will mean for Truman's "small" liberal arts school reputation.

"I don't really like the increase," she said. "Something I really liked about Truman was that it was small and easy to talk to the teachers because the classes are small."

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