



**Parents' Network Meeting (RPN)  
Meeting Highlights and Minutes  
Saturday, February 22, 2020**

**Present:**

**Parent Attendees:** Jean Ridgen P'19/P'22 (Co-Chair), Cheryl Bair P'22 (Co-Chair), Amy Fischer P'22 (Social Media Ambassador), Jim and Jody Barnett P'23, Cody Doerfler P'22, Julie Korb P'20, Candy McHugh P'21, Kathleen O'Brien P'21, Charles Reid P'21, Kristin and Keith Vanden Huevel P'23, Elizabeth and Mike Warner P'21

**College Administration/Staff:** Amy Gerretsen '04 (Director of Constituent Engagement), Shawn Karsten '09 (VP of Advancement), Lyn McCarthy '83 (Regional Director of Admission), Zach Messitte (President), Chris Ogle '80 (VP and Dean of Students), Kim Scanlon (Assistant to the VP of Advancement),

**Guests:** Kevin Gilligan (District Manager, Sodexo), Mike Senk (General Manager, Sodexo)

**Welcome, Introductions (9 a.m.)**

Co-Chair Jean Ridgen welcomed the group to campus. Self-introductions followed. Ridgen also shared details about services available at the Franzen Center for Academic Success located on the first floor of Lane Library.

Director of Constituent Engagement, Amy Gerretsen '04, shared an update on the search process for the Assistant Director of Engagement and Outreach position, a rehire resulting from the January 31 departure of Yvonne Nicklaus who had closely worked with the RPN since 2016.

The fall 2019 RPN meeting minutes were unanimously approved as written.

**Group Discussion (9:15 a.m.)**

Summer Orientation 2020 will be held on campus, June 22-24. New this year, only two sessions will be held (Monday-Tuesday and Tuesday-Wednesday) instead of the previous three sessions for incoming students and their families. RPN has hosted both evening Parent Socials (June 22 and 23) and lunch time Resource Fair Tabling (June 23 and 24).

2019 program feedback and thoughts on 2020 included:

- Less desserts needed, however adult beverages remain popular
- Out of state parents find orientation and parent socials very helpful - Add a formal question and answer session?
- Is Summer Orientation information sent out to those who don't attend?
- Should RPN do July outreach to families (i.e Welcoming Family program)?
- Bus tour was very helpful and informative - Could it be a part of the day, a required activity for parents?
- How to connect Summer Orientation roommates?

First Year Move in Day & Family Welcome Receptions were held on campus August 22, 2019 feedback included:

- Successful programming

- Loft situation is very challenging (get parts but don't know what to with them) - the company that is used does not provide written instructions, just a video, and campus staff (including RAs and Orientation Committee members) are not allowed to help due to liability
- Add Scott hall front door greeter
- Host receptions outside entrances to the buildings?
- Add more campus signage
- Is there anyway to rent a dolly for each dorm?

Gerretsen will provide RPN feedback to the Director of Student Activities and Orientation and Director of Residence Life concerning both Summer Orientation and Move In Day. Then, RPN volunteers details concerning 2020 opportunities will be available to the group later this spring.

Family Weekend was held on campus, October 9-10 and feedback included:

- Add more signage to campus and downtown to welcome families
- Take advantage of the football parents' tailgate and combined to include all families
- More hours at Bovay's for football families - a pop up shop at Ingalls and on campus store should be open at 10 a.m. on Saturday.

Gerretsen shared a full handout of Family Weekend feedback from the post-event participant surveys.

Thoughts for 2020 programming:

- Date needs to move from Friday-Saturday, October 9-10 because there is no home football game that day (schedule changed due to St Norbert leaving the conference)
- Should events be held for families Saturday and Sunday only?
- Add breakfast lectures so that families can interact more with faculty
- Add trivia as entertainment

Gerretsen will follow up with Athletics and Student Life concerning 2020 and 2021 potential Family Weekend schedules and shared programming/resources.

**Break** (9:45 a.m.)

**Admissions Update** (10 a.m.)

Lyn Rosenberg McCarthy '83, Regional Director of Admission, provided an update to the group. Please note that McCarthy grew up in Ripon and attended Ripon College. She currently lives in Mequon and works with southeastern Wisconsin high school students.

- 11 families are visiting today while Admission Counselors are busy reading applications, admitting students, collaborating with financial aid, planning for spring travel, and grooming juniors on the college application process
- Upcoming On Campus Events
  - March 1 - Celebration of Excellence dinner for admitted and deposited students)
  - April 17 - Accepted Student Days (again for admitted and deposited students)
  - Overnights are being offered to students
- Numbers are up in deposits (118 this year compared to 80 last year and 102 the year prior) - great momentum - includes one transfer student which usually deposit later
- Kudos were given to co-chairs Rigden and Cheryl Bair for authoring admitted student parent letter encouraging participation in RPN and Facebook page
- Maythe Salcedo '23, wrote a welcome parent letter to Spanish-speaking students which will be mailed March 1 to admitted families
- Personal connections are very important for campus visitors
  - Strong faculty support continues with admitted families
  - Current students are also a positive influence
- Positive reactions
  - "So nice!"
  - "Ripon feels better bigger than I thought!"

- Downtown Ripon is a great place for families to visit and connect with the community

### **Sodexo Food Service Update (10:15 a.m.)**

Kevin Gilligan, Sodexo District Manager, and Mike Senk, Sodexo General Manager, joined the RPN meeting to discuss the concerns of families and students, follow up on the January 15, 2020 letter to the community, and answer questions. Gilligan oversees 16 schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota and Ripon has the most active parent Facebook presence. Gilligan highlighted three main areas of focus:

1. Food Safety - Priority to Sodexo and undercooked food is taken very seriously, every step and process is reviewed immediately. On January 17, Sodexo held a full staff training meeting to reiterate all the necessary steps and processes to maintain safety.
2. Menu Variety - Ripon has struggled to keep a head chef long term which puts enormous pressure on Senk as the general manager and executive chef. Senk was able to complete a revamping to the five week menu cycle at the Commons which is available on the Bite app for students to menu plan and track nutritional value using My Fitness app. The Spot menu was revamped recently to decrease the ticket time and improve efficiency. Sodexo co-hosted a very successful catfish dinner (nearly made to order) with the Black Student Union on February 21.
3. Feedback - Students must share with Sodexo right away so that problems can be addressed in a timely fashion. Most of the time a correction can be made immediately for the student. Sodexo's regional marketing manager spent two days on campus last fall to show students how to use the Bite app and report feedback to Senk. Early second semester, Senk visited Student Senate to get feedback including the need for more vegan, vegetarian and plant based protein options. A student led culinary council will begin meeting in early March.

A parent question and answer session followed that addressed parent concerns for the following:

- Providing meals to children
- Students not utilizing meal plan
- An opportunity to opt out of the meal plan
- High cost of room and board
- Declining quality over time
- Regaining the confidence of the students

Senk shared the Ripon Dining News with the group and reported that the most recent student survey reported an 85% satisfaction rate. Sodexo is taking many steps to improve the student experience and encourage diners to return including new signage, actively asking for feedback and introducing the Culinary Council.

Ridgen reminded the families in attendance that students may find it easier to complain to parents, but suggested that students must advocate for themselves. Parents should encourage this behavior in their students when it comes to complaining about Sodexo.

It was agreed that coaches of fall sports need to be very clear with their athletes and parents on what is provided in pre-season and what is not.

### **Sodexo Closed Discussion (11 a.m.)**

President Zach Messitte and Chris Ogle '80, Vice President and Dean of Students, spoke to the group in detail about the current request for proposal (RFP) process that the College is undertaking with several food service providers, including Sodexo who holds the current contract. Highlights include:

- President Messitte stated that the perception of Sodexo is decreasing and that can be an issue for regaining confidence between Sodexo and the student body.
- RFP hasn't been completed in many years - Dean Ogle must provide a lot of information to potential providers. Several have already said they aren't interested in Ripon, others are very interested in the process.
- Ripon has four food outlets to evaluate and staff (Commons, Spot, Starbucks, Willmore) - too many for a student body Ripon's size?

- An important component of the building trust with students is the strong relationship to those who are preparing their food each day.
- Need to balance the needs of all student (healthy v. fried)

Additionally, Messitte provided the group an update on the State of the College including:

- Retention - 92% of first years returned for second semester; major indicator is sophomores without a declared major
- Net tuition revenue continues to decline (national trend) and of Ripon's 800 students only 150 pay more than \$25,000 per year in tuition - Ripon is engaging in a tuition transparency debate currently
- Faculty renewals and popularity of majors - traditional liberal arts (biology, philosophy, music, etc.) v. non-liberal arts (business, education, etc.)
- Faculty cuts to preserve colleagues - 6% faculty salary cuts for all tenure track faculty (including President Messitte) and an extension on the step system between ranks
- Catalyst curriculum - first class completing the program is graduating this spring, no longitudinal data from employers yet, but tying the skill set to the liberal arts remains a focus of the faculty and curriculum
- Academic calendar considerations - fall break (costly fall/winter athlete overlap), winter break (3 v. 4 weeks), etc.
- Strategic planning - Ripon just completed the very time consuming, ten year accreditation cycle

Ridgen provided a few closing comments to highlight all of the good work that Ripon College does and all of the great things that are provided to the students. In particular, she indicated that progress is being made on the grade posting discussion that started on Facebook recently. Again, the biggest way in which parents and families can support their students through College and unknown processes along the way is to teach advocacy.

**Adjournment** (12 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted,



Amy Gerretsen '04  
Director of Constituent Engagement