The Advancement and Communications Committee meeting on Tuesday, March 24, 2015 featured student presentations on alumni and parent engagement programs that involve students directly in fundraising and engagement efforts. The Committee additionally heard regular reports on fundraising, communications, and the Council of Foundations.

After Committee Co-chair John Griffin opened the meeting and welcomed guests, Bill Fryer, Chair of the Council of Foundations, updated the Committee on progress made relative to collaborative initiatives among the school- and unit-based foundations and University Advancement. Mr. Fryer noted that a task force comprised of senior development professionals from across Grounds is working to identify ways to enhance the structure of the University’s collective advancement operations and better coordinate how the various areas work together. He added that this group has already made good progress.

Senior Vice President for University Advancement Bob Sweeney shared some very positive news related to fundraising progress. Through the end of February, the University’s total philanthropic cash flow was $161 million for the fiscal year, up 29% over the same period last year. New commitments (which exclude pledge payments but include new gifts and new pledges received this fiscal year) stand at $142 million, up 10% over the same period last year. Mr. Sweeney also highlighted specific fundraising successes, including a significant number of $1M+ gifts this year, underscoring that these gifts, and the other increases he reported, are well-distributed across the schools and units.

Associate Vice President for Development Mark Luellen updated the Committee on the work underway in the University Development Office to reorganize and rebuild in preparation for the Bicentennial Campaign. Mr. Luellen shared that the implementation of new performance metrics has had a positive impact on results. He further emphasized the success of various collaborative advancement initiatives across Grounds relating to fundraising, leadership, professional development, and policy review/clarification.

Mary Elizabeth Luzar, Director of Student and Young Alumni Programs at the Alumni Association, provided a brief introduction to a presentation on Class Councils and Trustees by Will Laverack, President of the Fourth Year Trustees, and Blake Griggs, Vice President of the Fourth Year Trustees. Messrs. Laverack and Griggs described the goals and activities of the Councils and Trustees, which are sponsored by the Alumni Association and work to build class community, foster a lifelong connection to the University, and develop student and alumni leaders. These groups organize several important events on Grounds throughout the academic year, including charity benefits, career workshops, and the Lighting of the Lawn.

Fourth Year Trustees choose the Valedictory speaker each year and raise funds for U.Va. through the class giving program. They remain Trustees for five years following graduation, serving to encourage their fellow classmates to remain connected and to follow up on the giving pledges made in their last year, bridging the gap leading up to their first official Reunion five years after graduation. Messrs. Laverack and Griggs noted that the giving participation rate among fourth-years had increased to 81% last year, and they underscored
the impact they’ve seen the Councils and Trustees have on developing alumni who care about the University.

Cindy Fredrick, Associate Vice President for Engagement and Annual Giving in University Advancement, introduced fourth-year students Helan Kang and Rafat Khan, who shared their experiences as leaders within the UVaClubs Student Ambassadors program. The Student Ambassadors program is sponsored by University Advancement’s Office of Engagement, and works to strengthen the connections between U.Va. alumni, parents, and current students.

Ms. Kang and Mr. Khan emphasized how much they enjoy their roles as Student Ambassadors, and described several initiatives the program organizes, including professional trainings for current students by alumni, and a collaboration with the Alumni Association that involves making congratulatory calls to admitted students. Student Ambassadors also share their experiences as current students at summer student send-offs. Ms. Kang and Mr. Khan – who hail from China and Bangladesh, respectively – highlighted the joy they feel when relating their personal experiences as international students and how sharing their stories seems to diminish some of the particular anxieties that prospective international students and their families face.

The Committee and other meeting attendees enjoyed hearing about these programs directly from the students, and seeing their commitment, energy, and enthusiasm. It was clear that these students understand how important their efforts are in laying the groundwork for lifelong engagement with U.Va. and reinforcing the connections essential for the success of the University.

Chief Communications Officer Dave Martel closed the meeting with a video documenting several current students’ experiences with the Alternative Spring Break program. Mr. Martel shared the video as an example of University Communications’ efforts to organize around telling students’ stories, giving prospective students a clearer picture about life as a member of the U.Va. community.

On that note the meeting adjourned.