

## MINUTES

### Nicholas School Town Hall Meeting with Dean Bill Chameides

Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 – LSRC A158

Hosted by the Nicholas School Student Council (NSSC)

*The audio recording made malfunctioned and is not available. The following summary is translated from notes taken and is not a comprehensive nor verbatim transcript of the session. Any errors herein are solely those of the NSSC.*

Start 3:20pm

*Dean Chameides greets audience of students and staff, and notes number of 1<sup>st</sup> Year and 2<sup>nd</sup> Year MEM students. Begins with update on the status of the Nicholas Hall:*

*Topic: Nicholas Hall*

**Dean Chameides:** Due in part to the current economic situation, the Nicholas Hall building that was planned to replace the current Gross Chemistry Building will not be built at this time. Instead, a smaller facility, “the Annex”, will be built adjacent to the LSRC, where the parking lot is currently. The Annex will eventually house many of the Durham offices of the Nicholas School of the Environment (NSOE). Will be Platinum-LEED certified. An architect has been hired. Time frame has not been finalized.

There will be opportunity for student, staff, faculty and Duke personnel participation in the sustainability design and construction of the new Nicholas School Annex.

Nicholas Hall will remain in the long-term plans of the NSOE.

*Dean Chameides also notes the stressful impact that the current global financial situation has had on the NSOE community, and emphasizes that the school is working hard to make sure that all students, staff, and faculty are cared for.*

*Topic: Nickipedia*

**Staff Audience:** What is the wiki?

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** Nickipedia is a project begun by the NSSC with the support of Dean Chameides and technical assistance from Nicholas IT. Nickipedia will serve as a student-written, one stop resource for information related to the Nicholas School experience. It will be a way for each class of students to leave their suggestions and opinions on courses and adjusting to life at the NSOE, so that a bank of knowledge can be maintained and help new students plan their academic and personal life during their time here. Students will edit the content and the NSSC will be responsible for moderating the site, but

Nickipedia will also be open to others in the NSOE community to edit and share information. There will be other tools such as rideshare postings or lost and found lists that will be useful to the community.

**Dean Chameides:** The wiki, like Wikipedia, will be a editable, searchable resource for all in the Nicholas community. We also hope it can also serve as a recruiting tool for prospective students.

**Audience:** Who can edit it?

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** Currently, editing permission is set to allow anyone with a Duke net-id, given that others in the Duke community may have an interest in sharing information with the NSOE community. Viewing access is currently set to anyone in the World Wide Web.

**Audience:** Will “old people”/alumni input be sought?

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** Certainly, and alumni input is especially needed, because their input on the practical application and benefit of various courses will be invaluable to current students, and is currently not easily accessible to current students. NSSC will develop a method to receive alumni comments and for alumni to have access to Nickipedia.

*Topic: Science communication and science education in the Nicholas School*

**Audience:** An exchange student from Russia asks about the Nicholas School’s offerings and curriculum in environmental science media communications, and environmental education.

**Dean Chameides:** Media relations and communications is a very important facet of environmental management. NSOE students can partner and learn from the Duke Center for Documentary Studies. NSOE does not offer specific training in environmental education.

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** NSOE will also offer a student-organized “Art of Communicating Science” class in the Spring, a one unit seminar drawing on in-house expertise (Dean Chameides, Nicholas Institute, Nicholas media staff, etc.) to offer students perspective on media outreach and translating science to the public.

*Topic: Changes to Masters Projects and the MEM curriculum*

**Dean Chameides:** What do students think about the usefulness of the MP, the possibility of contracting the number of program areas, and the introduction of core courses? How important is the MP? Alumni have been known to be proud of their MP and found them useful in job searches. What if the MP was optional for graduation, and those completing an MP would receive a degree “with distinction”?

**Student Audience:** MP is not that big a deal. That the Nicholas School requires an MP rather than a thesis was a reason why some students were attracted to the program. Other reactions:

- MP's are not rewarding, and often seen as hoops that you have to jump through to receive the degree.
- Some MEM students chose this degree because it is not as focused on one project at a MS with a thesis would have been.
- MP success is hit and miss. Preferably students would have project idea and data compiled during summer research season in order to have time to finish a decent MP. However, internships may not work out, interests may change, data maybe unavailable, and in the end, some students are left scrambling to find a back up project (on top of dealing with classes) during Fall, with only a very limited time remaining to go from lit search to analysis to completion.
- MP's are one more thing to worry about, at the same time when job searches are ramping up.
- UCSB model is mentioned by several students, attractive because for different reasons: group project, and list of solicited clients and projects to choose from.
- Also, many students find that client-based, product-driven classes (e.g. survey methods) have been far more educational in terms of practical, research/management experience.

**Dean Chameides:** One idea is to randomly assign students into groups of 5 as soon as they arrive, and form a team and learn to work as a group. Does that sound goofy?

**Student Audience:** Unsure. Similar to Fuqua format.

**Dean Chameides:** Core courses idea? One concept is to divide first semester into 3-week blocks, where students can pursue blocks of courses that form a "track" suitable for their educational interests, e.g. tracks with blocks of quantitative courses for those more math-savvy. Students can also rotate amongst blocks/tracks, similar to Fuqua? Another concept is to have all students share in common core classes, to foster a common experience and more familiarity with fellow classmates.

**Student Audience:** One certainty is that requirements such as pre-requisite tests, statistics, and other core courses need to be restructured.

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** Regarding curriculum, a personal suggestion is that instead of shaping program areas by topic area, one could organize the MEM concentrations based on the functional roles that graduates would fill in an environmental management organization. That is, based on tasks that students are naturally inclined to perform as part of a group, such as manager, technician, or communicator. Students can pursue topic-focused knowledge through the diverse classes offered at NSOE, but core classes would be designed to foster the skills required for each functional role.

**Dean Chameides:** Would like a compilation of the comments voiced today on improving MP and MEM curriculum, and will take all of these ideas into consideration. Also welcomes students to submit to him any other suggestions on MP's and MEM program improvements.

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** The next NSSC office will plan for the biannual MEM program survey, and the new officers can work with the Dean to focus particularly on the MP and the future of the MEM curriculum. The most recent survey (2007) is available on the web on Nickipedia under the NSSC page. Google “Nickipedia” to find the site.

*Topic: Availability of Course Information*

**Student Audience:** Course syllabi and detailed descriptions are frequently unavailable on the official Nicholas homepage. Often had to pick course solely based on the course title, and this is very frustrating.

**Dean Chameides:** NSOE is in the process of updating all course listings on the homepage to remove courses not currently taught. All instructors should have a course plan or syllabus available for distribution anyway, and it is a matter of making that information accessible on the web.

**Ben Landis (NSSC):** Nickipedia will also have detailed course reviews from the student perspective.

**Katie LaJeunesse (NSSC/NicIT):** NicIT also recently discussed this topic. The uploading of syllabi is part of the already-required faculty evaluations. The technology system that has been developed for these evals allows faculty information on the Nicholas website to be updated automatically, and so syllabi could potentially be uploaded the same time. NicIT is aware of the need for easier access to course information such as syllabi.

**Student Audience:** Also difficult to find information on whether a course will be offered, until the very last minute, making it difficult to plan academic schedule.

**Dean Chameides:** In those situations, the school unfortunately also does not have advanced notice about course offering plans or changes to a professor’s schedule.

Go to <https://wiki.duke.edu/display/nickipedia/Home>

*Dean Chameides closes with praise for the hard work and dedication of MEM students, and wishes them luck as they progress on their projects and job and internship searches. He reiterates the administration’s dedication to improving student education, encouraging all in the community to come to him with suggestions and ideas for the school and maintain the conversation.*

End 4:00pm