

University Affairs Committee meeting with Jennifer Almquist, Chief of Staff to President Andrea Goldsmith, on November 11, 2025

Participants:

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| Alexander Orlov (Committee Chair) | Materials Science and Chemical Engineering |
| Jennifer Almquist (Guest) | Chief of Staff to President Andrea Goldsmith |
| Jessica Seeliger | Cancer Center |
| Kimberly Towers | Writing and Rhetoric |
| Lisa-Beth Plantania | Philosophy |

Quick recap

The meeting began with introductions, setting the stage for a discussion about Stony Brook University's priorities and challenges. Jennifer provided insights on public image, strategic planning, and alumni engagement. The group explored opportunities for improving shared governance and communication between committees, administration, and departments, with a focus on better supporting the University Senate and fostering alumni connections.

Next steps

- Alexander Orlov: get transcript, summarize it, and send summary to Jennifer Almquist for editing
- Alexander Orlov: post final edited summary on Senate website after Jennifer's Almquist review
- Committee: potentially interview interim vice president for marketing and communications
- Committee: continue focus on Alumni Relations as identified priority topic
- Committee: explore coordination and communication improvements between different Senate committees

Summary

University Priorities Discussion with Jennifer Almquist

Jennifer agreed to participate in a free-flowing conversation and confirmed that Committee Chair would summarize the meeting transcript and send it to her for review before posting it on the Senate website. The attendees introduced themselves, and Alexander Orlov asked Jennifer Almquist for her perspective on issues within the university's remit, such as publicity, athletics, and alumni relations, to guide future focus areas.

Stony Brook's Strategic Planning Initiatives

Jennifer Almquist discussed the importance of public image and strategic planning for Stony Brook University, highlighting ongoing efforts to refresh the strategic plan and improve marketing and communications. She mentioned the university's fundraising progress and noted that alumni relations is an area where Stony Brook could improve, given its younger age compared to peer institutions. Jennifer Almquist also emphasized the need to engage students to foster a sense of belonging and connection, and encouraged the committee to explore opportunities in athletics, given the rapidly changing landscape.

University Aspirations and Resource Challenges

Jennifer Almquist and Alexander Orlov discussed the challenges of organizing alumni gatherings due to resource constraints and lack of participation from departments. They also talked about President Goldsmith's bold aspirations for the university to become one of the top public institutions in the country, with Jennifer Almquist emphasizing the importance of aligning these aspirations with the institution's core mission and values, particularly in supporting first-generation and Pell-eligible students. There was discussion about the University's marketing and communication efforts, noting constraints on our ability to do everything we might want to do, including promoting research on a national scale.

Stony Brook Alumni Engagement Strategies

The group discussed Stony Brook University's engagement with alumni, with Kimberly Towers sharing her experience as an active alumni who was unaware of the Career Center's services for graduates. Jennifer Almquist noted that while the recent homecoming was successful, she had met a number of alumni who were just returning for the first time since graduation, representing untapped opportunities for engagement such as through mentorship and connection with current students. The discussion highlighted the need to better communicate how Stony Brook has changed and how alumni can get involved, with particular interest expressed in the university's international travel programs for alumni and friends.

Stony Brook University Strategic Review

Jennifer Almquist reflected on Stony Brook University's strengths and challenges, highlighting its youth as both an opportunity for innovation and a potential disadvantage due to less established traditions. She noted the university's strong commitment from its staff and students, as well as the need to modernize processes and practices. Alexander Orlov discussed benchmarking Stony Brook against other institutions like UC San Diego, acknowledging the difference between UC and SUNY systems. He also inquired about the shared governance and how the committee could assist in spreading information to the Senate.

Strengthening Shared Governance at Stony Brook

Jennifer Almquist and Alexander Orlov discussed the importance of shared governance at Stony Brook University, highlighting its role in university operations and the need to strengthen practices. They identified opportunities for improved communication between committees and administration, as well as the potential for additional resources to support the University Senate.

Alexander Orlov suggested enhancing coordination between different units and departments, while Jennifer Almquist emphasized the importance of departments in fostering alumni connections and student engagement. Both agreed on the need for better support and communication to optimize shared governance efforts.