

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STUDENT AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF MEETING
DECEMBER 5, 2007

[In these minutes: Graduation Planner, Disability Services Update]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the view of, nor are they binding on the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Jeffrey Wencil, chair, Thomas Bilder, Kendre Turonie, Jean-Marie Del-Santo, Jennifer Engler, Curt Baker, Eric Brown, Maureen Kunkler, Caroline Younts

REGRETS: Nathan Pelzer, Kim Roufs, Catherine Solheim, Megan Hayes, Hilary Ploeckelmann, Olga Zakharenko, Tina Falkner

ABSENT: Amelious Whyte, Andy Howe, Ian McConnell

OTHERS ATTENDING: Gabriele Schmiegel

GUESTS: Kasi Williamson and William Dana Peggy Mann Rinehart, associate director, Disability Services

I). Jeffrey Wencil called the meeting to order and asked those present to introduce themselves.

II). Members unanimously approved the October 3, 2007 minutes.

III). Mr. Wencil welcomed Kasi Williamson and William Dana who had been invited to provide the committee with a demonstration of Graduation Planner (<https://onestop2.umn.edu/gradplanner/home.jsp>). The goal of Grad Planner is graduation noted Ms. Williamson. This is one of several University initiatives to improve graduation rates. Grad Planner is a web-based tool intended to provide undergraduate students and their advisors with access to the essential information they need in order for students to graduate in 4 years.

As background information Ms. Williamson noted that in 2001 the Graduation and Retention Subcommittee of the Council of Undergraduate Deans issued a report, *Improving Our Graduation Rate* (http://www.academic.umn.edu/provost/undergrad/pdf/gradrate_main.pdf). This report made four recommendations:

1. Communicate Clear and Explicit Institutional Expectations.
2. Making the Commitment to Help Students Stay on Track.
3. Removing Institutional Barriers and Providing Incentives for Success.
4. Balancing Access with Success.

It became apparent from the onset that while there was a lot of information about graduation available across the University, it was not centrally located and easy to find. Hence, in 2004, the Electronic Course Authorization System (ECAS) was implemented followed by the Program and Curriculum Approval System in 2005, and, in 2007, Grad Planner was launched.

Since August 2007, 9,297 students have created 11,934 graduation plans systemwide. Anecdotal feedback to date has been positive. System enhancements will be ongoing.

Next, members were given a Grad Planner demonstration where the application's features were highlighted.

In terms of promoting this tool, conversations are underway with Orientation & First Year Programs (<http://www.ofyp.umn.edu/>) to introduce Graduation Planner during Welcome Week stated Ms. Williamson. A member stated that in spite of the fact that most students are quite tech-savvy, this application is not intuitive, and, therefore, application demonstrations will be important. Another member commented that this tool should definitely be brought to Orientation & First Year Programs, but it needs to go even beyond this. Other ideas mentioned by committee members for advertising this tool included hanging posters in classrooms, encourage academic advising offices to excite students about using Grad Planner, emailing students prior to orientation with information about Grad Planner and encourage them to play with it, advertise Grad Planner at the CLA Majors Fair Ms. Williamson stated that naturally One Stop will also be used to advance the use of Grad Planner, and there are efforts underway to have the Minnesota Daily run an article about Grad Planner.

Will this tool be available for use by graduate students in the future asked a member? According to Mr. Dana, there are a couple of graduate programs Grad Planner could potentially work for, however, the APAS (Academic Progress Audit System) report, which Grad Planner is built on, does not contain information for most graduate student programs.

In closing, Ms. Williamson noted that the vision for Grad Planner is to integrate it with other planning tools so it becomes a comprehensive 4-year planning tool. The next initiative linked to Grad Planner is Student Engagement Planner which provides information about community engagement opportunities.

Mr. Wencl thanked Ms. Williamson and Mr. Dana for demonstrating and sharing information about Grad Planner.

IV). Mr. Wencl welcomed Peggy Mann Rinehart, associate director of Disability Services. Ms. Mann Rinehart began by emphasizing that Disability Services provides accommodations for both students and staff. This is important to know because it illustrates that the University fundamentally supports people with disabilities.

Faculty and staff do not need to have a 'documented disability' to take advantage of the services offered through Disability Services. University employees that become injured either at work or not at work are eligible to receive accommodations through Disability Services. Disability Services collaborates with approximately 11 other offices on campus and serves about 700 employees per year reported Ms. Mann Rinehart.

Disability Services (DS) also has a Student Services division, which works with students with disabilities. Ms. Mann Rinehart stated that not all students with disabilities require accommodations, and not all students with disabilities require accommodations in all their classes. She added that DS currently serves between 1200 – 1400 students per year, and this number has been growing at a rate of 5% - 17% per year over the past 5 years. The largest student group served by DS are those with mental health and psychiatric disabilities.

In Ms. Mann Rinehart's opinion, the accommodations offered by DS can be useful for all students, and not just disabled students. The more that 'natural' accommodations are made, the less likely the University is to discriminate against anyone.

Accommodations provided by DS include, but are not limited to:

- Consultation with colleges, faculty, staff and department heads on how to make course accommodations. For example, faculty should try to make as many of their handouts and lectures available electronically as possible.
- Captioning services.
- Sign language interpreting services.
- Conversion of print materials into an electronic format called Kurzweil. Kurzweil is a program that reads text out loud. It is often used by people with low vision, but is increasingly being used to accommodate people with a variety of learning and attention disabilities. Individuals, on the other hand, that are totally blind rarely use Kurzweil, but tend to use JAWS, a software program that speaks text very quickly.
- Braille services.
- Testing accommodation services.
- Note taking and other services provided by student access assistants. The goal is to make sure that the work that student access assistants do contributes to their overall educational experience at the University.

Along with other pamphlets, Ms. Mann Rinehart distributed a pamphlet, *Access for Students with Disabilities*, which outlines DS's responsibility to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and state regulations. As one of the University's Compliance Partners (http://www.instcomp.umn.edu/about_cp.html), DS must be aware of all situations where students do not have access to information and/or materials that would expose the University to any sort of legal liability. As an example Ms. Mann Rinehart cited the AFSCME strike this fall when some instructors wanted to take their classes off campus. This was problematic for DS and the students it serves.

The University's DS office is one of the largest not only in the Big 10 but across the country. It has the full support of the University and is centrally funded.

Next, Ms. Mann Rinehart distributed a Universal Design pamphlet. The purpose of this pamphlet is to have faculty think about how they might be able to improve upon and enhance the learning outcomes for their students by thinking about new ways for delivering information.

Ms. Mann Rinehart on behalf Rachel Garaghty, president, Disabled Students Cultural Center (DSCC) shared information about DSCC. DSCC (<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~dsc/>) was founded over ten years ago and serves students with disabilities and allies of students with disabilities through various programming initiatives such as Lunch and Learn events, sponsorship of Disabilities Awareness Month. DSCC is also involved in efforts across the University to establish a Disabilities Studies Program.

DSCC in partnership with Recreational Sports have established an Adaptive Sports Club (<http://www.sua.umn.edu/groups/directory/show.php?id=1800>). Courage Center is lending its adaptive recreation knowledge to this initiative.

The DSCC offers great leadership opportunities for students. They are continually seeking new members as well as board members.

Questions/comments from members included:

- Do students that need testing accommodations take their tests at Disability Services in McNamara Alumni Center? They can, stated Ms. Mann Rinehart, or they can also get these accommodations through their college, assuming their college offers testing accommodations. Ms. Mann Rinehart believes whenever possible testing accommodations should be done in a student's college. One reason for this is that whenever a student is away from his/her instructor or teaching assistant during a testing situation, they are at a disadvantage.
- Please explain why some students are unable to take tests with the rest of the class. Ms. Mann Rinehart explained that there are many reasons why this occurs. For example, some students have test anxiety where they find it impossible to manage this anxiety in a high stakes environment. Additionally, while some students might have great verbal skills, they cannot read well. What makes this accommodation difficult for instructors to understand is that the nature of the disability that the student has is private, and the student is under no obligation to disclose his/her disability. Ms. Mann Rinehart stated that DS gives accommodations that allow students to pass or fail on their own merit. She added that DS is not asking for colleges to make exceptions for students; every student with a disability goes through the same rigorous admissions process as every other student on campus.
- Will DS test international students that have never been tested, for example, for a learning disability? This is a complicated issue noted Ms. Mann Rinehart, and it has to do with understanding what a 'documented disability' is. A 'documented disability' means a student must have limitations in one of five areas:

- Loss of hearing.
- Loss of vision.
- Loss of mobility.
- Inability to perform activities of daily independent living.
- Inability to access information in a conventional manner.

DS does not test for 'documented disabilities'. It can, however, refer students to places where they can get assessed, but this can be quite expensive. Ms. Mann Rinehart noted that not all chronic illnesses are disabilities and not all disabilities are chronic illnesses.

- DSCC should explore whether disabled University students would be eligible to participate in the We Can Ride program (<http://www.wecanride.org/>), which is housed at the new University of Minnesota Equine Center (UMEC).

Mr. Wencil thanked Ms. Mann Rinehart for her informative update.

V). Hearing no further business, Mr. Wencil adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate