

Disabilities Issues Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

10:00 ~ 11:30 a.m.

Morrill Hall, 238A

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

[In these minutes ~ Board of Regents Disability Services Policy]

Present: Alex Lubet (chair), Carla Tabourne, Donna Johnson, Victoria Nelson, Mary Muwahid, Michelle Jones, Amber Mayer, Tammy Berberi, Frank Symons, Carol Rachac, Julia Robinson, Kimberly Simon, Miriam Krause

Regrets: Joanie Tool, Susan Rose

Absent: Peggy Mann Rinehart, Dale Branton, Joanna O'Connell, Brittany Parkman

Guest: Jon Steadland, Assistant to the Board of Regents

Chair Lubet began by informing members that this would be his last meeting as chair. Introductions were made and Lubet directed members' attention to their guest speaker, Jon Steadland.

Board of Regents Disability Services Policy ~ Jon Steadland

Mr. Steadland, assistant to the Board of Regents (BOR), distributed the current BOR Disability Services Policy to members as well as a draft of the new policy. He noted that the policy was adopted in 1992 and amended in 1996. Steadland stated that the BOR are using the current policy as a template to revise a new, broader policy and guidelines for procedure. He continued, stating that Section I is the guiding principles listing what the University will do and Section II is the how the University will implement the policy. He said that administration has been consulting with committees such as this one to help revise the policy.

Professor Berberi was pleased with the inclusion of building and facilities access for the disabled on the revised policy. She said she would like to see building and facility accessibility specified in the new policy. Berberi asked when the new policy could be shared with colleagues and Steadland responded that the information could be shared now but the actual policy will not be available to the University community until the BOR votes on it, which will be soon. Chair Lubet noted the importance of access at the Graduate School. He also stated that people in the disabilities community are uncomfortable with physicians being the voice for those with disabilities. He said that physicians do not know or care much about the real-life ramifications of disabilities and because of that, they do not make good spokespersons. He added that the disabilities community is concerned about the medical community in general. Ms. Johnson said that her office, Disability Services, is looking into the required amount of expert or physician

documentation people need in order to prove their disability. Mr. Steadland responded that, in general, the fine details of documentation are left up to individual departments as far as language and dealing with individual situations in accordance with the law. He said he would be glad to work with Ms. Johnson on terminology in respect to policy practice.

Chair Lubet said there is fear among some instructors that if there is no official documentation on disabilities that everyone will claim a disability to gain favor. He said in reality, it is difficult to get students to disclose their disabilities. He asked Ms. Johnson if they receive many applicants faking a disability. Johnson said no, in fact they are serving less than half of the students on campus that have a disability. Professor Berberi suggested adding a section about fostering advocacy skills under Section II: Implementation. She thinks it is important to create an environment where students are encouraged to seek advocacy. Lubet said that he thinks it is an excellent policy and thinks the University has an extraordinary Disability Services office. Lubet said he would like to see the policy disseminated to the campus community as soon as possible. Steadland said that the policy is on an upcoming agenda for the BOR and he is working to get input and add relative content suggestions prior to submission. Johnson told members that they could send any suggestions or input to her via email and she would put them together to pass onto Mr. Steadland.

Ms. Simon asked if Ms. Johnson's office policy provides an advocacy piece and Johnson responded that it did not at this time. Ms. Mayer asked what education or information are professors given about disabilities and how to accommodate them. Lubet said there is none. Professor Tabourne said that there is a statement at the bottom of syllabi requesting that accommodations be made for the disabled but she said it seems to get overlooked. Simon said situations do come to her office when students are not being accommodated and they push back. She said it is at that time that they educate the particular professor involved but that is after the fact and not very proactive. Mayer asked if students should educate professors and Johnson stated that the relationship is a partnership in that sense but her office is working toward improvements in professor education. Tabourne suggested giving the policy information to the deans and department chairs to put it in the forefront. She stated that if deans and chairs think it is important, it will give the issues more power. Johnson stated that she is working with Provost McMaster on disabilities policies. Mr. Steadland said he thinks the policy will come into the June BOR meeting and they will continue to revise and improve the policy.

Disability Services Update ~ Donna Johnson

Ms. Johnson reported that Disability Services has been looking into Human Resources issues to assess whether or not they are properly staffed. She informed members that her department has been hiring and now have two additional service specialists. She said in addition to new staff, they have been reviewing department procedures and updating where necessary. Johnson said they are losing their space and will need to move. They are considering a merger with Counseling Consulting Services across the hall from their current site. Johnson said they provide the type of testing services that Disability Services uses and so it could be a good partnership. Members discussed document conversion programs that allow easier access and use for disabled students. Chair Lubet asked if text could be scanned and revised for those with visual disabilities and receive the materials prior to the start of class. Johnson responded that they cannot provide

that service just yet but increased accessibility is one of their goals. Professor Berberi said that all textbooks are required to be in etext form since 2006. Ms. Johnson stated that e-text is not consistent because it is not compatible with all of the varying systems used. She said that is part of the problem; there is no consistency between programs and software making it difficult for users.

Ms. Johnson reported that the In Touch Graphics website will verbally describe tunnel graphics for the blind. She said there is a new communications director at the Office of Equity & Diversity and she will be working with her to promote Disability Services. She said replacement of the elevator in Scott Hall is moving forward. They are currently taking bids for the job.

Other Business

Chair Lubet encouraged members to register for the upcoming disabilities studies conference. He stated that he put a call out for papers and invited members to submit their own. He said they would need to be able to talk about their work for approximately 10 minutes and that their paper should include some findings that support it. He said papers are due to him by May 15th. He said the interdisciplinary aspect of the minor has everything to do with disabilities because it says that nothing is accomplished alone or by just one person. Professor Tabourne asked what would be the best way to promote the minor to her students in Kinesiology. Lubet suggested that advocates in genetics could attend the conference and take the information they learned back to their departments and educate others. Tabourne asked if the University is seeking faculty with such a minor. Lubet responded that there is a small corps of courses currently being developed for faculty. Lubet said there are courses already at the University but they do not address other dynamics of living with disabilities. He added that there is a need for courses that address the issues of everyday living with disabilities. He told members to watch for conference updates via email.

Lubet stated that the University competes for students with disabilities and he would like to see collaboration between institutions to create a document of best practices.

Professor Berberi announced that this is her last year of service on the committee and that she is having difficulty finding someone to take her place. Lubet stated that he would like to have someone from every campus to serve on the committee. He suggested a student to Berberi and she said she was told that it must be a tenured faculty. She said she would contact Becky Hippert, University Senate Office, about replacing her.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:13 a.m.

Lisa Towry
University Senate Office