

Disabilities Issues Committee
April 20, 2016
Minutes of the Meeting

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 represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

[In these minutes: Exploring the Classroom Experience of Students with Disabilities; Institutional Surveys that Inform the Experience of Students with Disabilities; Disability Resource Center Update]

PRESENT: Peggy Martin (chair). Michele Chillinski, Kim Doberstein, Donna Johnson, Katy O'Brien, Betsy Kerr, Lars Odesson, Katherine Murphy, David Fuecker, Maki Isaka

ABSENT: Rachel Bergerson, Carol Carrier, Mari Magler, Roberta Kehne, Gergory Cuomo, Beth Jones, Paige Mackey, Jane Jones, David Johnson, Perry Moriearty, Libby Parker, Heather Peters

REGRETS: Anna Mosser, Regan Pelton, Victoria Nelson, Andy Hillis, John DeHaan, Kim Doberstein

GUESTS: Robert Utke, Office of Institutional Research; Emily Ehlinger, graduate student, Department of Organizational Leadership

Peggy Martin, chair, welcomed the committee and asked committee members to introduce themselves. She then announced that Katherine Murphy will be chairing the committee next year.

1. Exploring the Classroom Experience of Students with Disabilities: Martin invited Emily Ehlinger, graduate student, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, to talk about her research in-progress, which focused on the classroom experience of students with disabilities. Ehlinger said she started her research by looking at the historical and legal context of access for students with disabilities, and the transition from high school to postsecondary education. She studied why students do and do not disclose their disability, and identity development and intersectionality.

Ehlinger said that around 11% of undergraduates nationally had a disability, but about 1/3 of those students chose not to disclose that information, and that students with disabilities have lower college attendance and lower retention rates.

She said her guiding questions for the research were as follows:

1. To what extent are students' disabilities and other social identities salient to them in postsecondary classroom environments?
2. What classroom experiences and practices do students with disabilities feel create barriers to their learning?

3. What classroom practices and experiences do students with disabilities feel support their learning?
4. To what extent do these classroom practices and experiences align with the principle of Universal Design?

Her study started in Spring 2016 and, said Ehlinger, is a qualitative study focusing on the narrative of students. Her sample included thirteen University of Minnesota students, sophomores through seniors. She wanted both those registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and those not registered to participate. She acknowledged the limitations of the small sample size, the self-selection of participants, and inclusion of only two who were unregistered at DRC. She also acknowledged that her own identity may have influenced what students were willing to share.

Ehlinger listed the following observations at this point in her research:

- Disability is a very salient identity, especially in the classroom.
- Their disabilities are layered. Many have mental health diagnoses as well.
- Identities are not static. They change according to the context.
- Many feel they have developed empathy, resilience, and are wellness-oriented as a result of their diagnosis.
- Sharing information about the self can be important, whether in class or through assignments.
- Instructor openness to them and interest in them is important.
- Positive classroom climate has an impact on learning.
- Syllabi that address mental health and disability information is important.
- Discussions in classrooms help them with making sense of information.
- Application to the real-world and understanding why they are learning what they are learning is important.
- Clear expectations and details for assignments help them feel less vulnerable.

Barriers to learning included:

- Impersonal classrooms with a feeling of competition.
- Limited communication with instructor.
- Inflexibility or attitudinal perception determines whether they will share their disability with an instructor.
- Skepticism from instructors and peers.
- Being used as an example if their identity is visible.

Ehlinger's preliminary findings demonstrated that the students experienced a skepticism of self at the beginning of the study. Many had a recent disability diagnosis and many were experiencing medication side-effects. Many were also experiencing personal trauma, but most of the students indicated a significant drive to do well. Moving forward, Ehlinger hopes to share the voices of students with disabilities, and to provide examples of their experience on campus, from their perspective. She said she wanted to continue the conversation about disability identity, but broaden that conversation so that everyone was involved. She hoped to reduce the

shame and stigma some of the students felt and help form a proactive approach to serving students with disabilities.

In response to questions about whether students identified as a group, Ehlinger replied that some students said they did not want to inform anyone about their disability, but the more they shared about themselves the more they found others with disabilities. None were involved in any disability-related group. Most, she said, talked about it as an individual identity and not so much an affiliation, and some approached it from a disability justice perspective.

She added that some students mentioned that often their sexual orientation and how safe they felt in that identity impacted how they chose to disclose their disability. Martin concluded the discussion but acknowledging the importance of continuing conversations on what Universal Design looks like and what the University wants to do in that regard.

2. Institutional Surveys that Inform the Experience of Students with Disabilities: Bob Utke, Office of Institutional Research, shared data from the latest Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey as it related to the outcomes of students with disabilities. Utke said that all undergraduates receive the survey in years that it is administered, and that it provides a nice comparison with other AAU institutions. He added that over the past couple of years they have been adding questions related to disability identity, such as:

- Students with a physical, psychological or learning disability like mine are respected on campus. (How strongly do you agree or disagree?)
- Do you have any physical disabilities that affect how you access or use campus facilities?
- Do you have any learning disabilities that affect how you read, study, or do your coursework?
- Do you have any psychological disabilities that affect how you learn or interact with others on campus?
- Do you currently receive accommodations from campus due to your disability?
- Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

Utke then provided some comparative information, using the data of five other Big Ten Universities. In general, University of Minnesota students' responses aligned with those of the Big Ten cohort. One exception was responses to the statement, "I belong at my campus." The students at the University responded with 48.2% reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, whereas the Big Ten schools responded with 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Additionally, said Utke, University students were slightly less satisfied with their social experience than those students at other Big Ten universities.

In regard to the quality of classrooms on campus, 17% of students with a physical disability ranked the University as excellent, but about 20% ranked it as fair or poor.

Utke said that it might be possible to parse the data by college, depending on the size of the college. Additionally, the data will be assessed over time to see whether the University is making improvements. He concluded by sharing the responses to an open-ended question asking how their disability affects their experience on campus.

Negative responses (most frequent to least frequent):

- Accessing environment

- Need more time
- Medical care inaccessible (mostly getting meds)
- Accommodation/supports unhelpful
- Campus stigma
- Feel helpless
- Faculty stigma
- Accommodations not honored
- Policy inequalities

Positives responses (least frequent to most frequent):

- Student support
- Receive good care
- Accommodations helping
- Disabilities Services supportive
- Faculty support
- Do not need help

Utke stated that if the committee wishes to move ahead with monitoring the experience for students with disabilities via SERU, they should think about the questions to ask, and figure out how those questions might be measured. He said that the very beginning of fall semester 2016 is when the questions would need to be submitted for the 2017 survey. Donna Johnson, director, Disability Resource Center, suggested that she could pose these optional questions to her Big Ten colleagues for comparison's sake. Murphy asked if there was any data available for graduate students, to which Utke replied that there was a survey, but he does not know what the questions are because he does not work with it.

The committee agreed it would be valuable to review what information the survey already provides for data that could be extracted and given to the committee. Johnson stated that her office is starting to look at graduation and retention rates. They would like to start with a cohort, incoming first-year students, and study them longitudinally.

Johnson then asked the committee's opinion regarding online training she had purchased, which addressed student accommodations and was geared to instructional staff, for up to 5000 page views. She said that only 259 out of 4500 instructional staff on the campus viewed the training. Johnson asked whether it was worth renewing the contract to continue providing the training. She asked the committee to review the page and provide her with feedback as to whether it was the right kind of training.

Professor Maki Isaka wondered if the committee could make a formal recommendation that all faculty should be required to take the training. Johnson replied that they have explored this option. She added that in the Big Ten, no one has training like this, so maybe 259 views is not so bad. Isaka stated that perhaps it is a matter of changing the culture, inclusiveness for all, at that maybe then faculty would buy into it more. Murphy added that perhaps it might also be considered in employee's merit reviews.

The committee then decided that one area of focus for 2016-2017 would be faculty participation and engagement on disabilities issues, as well as reviewing the report from Provost's committee on student mental health. They also agreed to discussions on the aging workforce and what that might mean for the University, as well as programs for first year students.

3. Disability Resource Center Update: Johnson stated that the Provost's Committee on Student Mental Health has written a white paper that has gone to Hanson and Danita Brown Young.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Patricia Straub
University Senate