

Student Senate Consultative Committee (SSCC)

April 20, 2017

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 reflects the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration, or the Board of Regents.

[In these minutes: Updates from SSCC Members; Chair update; St. Paul Resolution; System-Wide Sexual Assault Resources Funding Letter; Approval of May Student Senate Docket; Transition Reports; Review and Approval of Spring Chair, Vice Chair, and Ranking Senator Stipends; Introduction of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations]

PRESENT: Trish Palermo (chair), Runsheng Ma, Lauren Mitchell, Nick Ames, Alexander Holleran, Taylor Cronen, Patrick English, Katie Ledermann, Maddie Schwartz, Ellie Sjoquist, Fanda Yang

REGRETS: None.

ABSENT: John Freude

GUESTS: Rachel Kircher, student board president, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS); McKenzie Barth, student, CFANS; Brian Burnett, senior vice president of finance and operations, Office of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations

OTHERS: Ben Koisti, senator, University of Minnesota Crookston; Liz Eull, chief of staff, Office of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations

Chair Trish Palermo welcomed the committee, and members introduced themselves.

1. Updates from SSCC members -

- Runsheng Ma reported that the Senate Committee on Student Affairs (SCSA) had drafted a letter to the Budget 5 requesting additional resources to support student mental health resources on system campuses.
- Patrick English noted that the Minnesota Student Association (MSA) was working on the transition to new leadership for next academic year.
- Ellie Sjoquist said that the Crookston Student Association (CSA) had recently elected four new senators for the fall, and was exploring issues related to tuition.
- Taylor Cronen reported that the Rochester Student Association (RSA) had recently restructured, and that the Student Senate Consultative Committee (SSCC) representative would now be on the RSA Executive Board, in addition to the Student Representatives to the Board of Regents representative.
- Katie Ledermann noted that the Morris Campus Student Association (MCSA) would be passing their dining services sustainability practices resolution in two weeks.

- Aleksander Holleran, recently elected University of Minnesota Duluth Student Association (UMDSA) representative to the SSCC, said that his group had completed elections, and were working to bring the student attendance policy more in line with the policies on the other campuses.

2. Chair update - Palermo asked committee members to comment on the potential creation of a committee to evaluate major University contracts to assess business ethics, likely housed in Purchasing Services. Maddie Schwartz said that she was in favor of such a committee, and thought that it should include both faculty and student representation. Holleran said that it would be important to have someone on the committee with an expertise in business ethics, and Lauren Mitchell agreed.

Palermo then asked the committee if they were in favor of drafting a letter to legislators calling for increased funding to the University. Ben Koisti, senator, University of Minnesota Crookston, said that he was in favor of the letter, but did not have time to help draft it, noting that he would pass it along to CSA for support. English said that he was supportive of drafting a letter, but it should be done in kind with making personal connections to legislators.

During the meeting, Palermo received a draft letter from students to legislators via email from Will Dammann, director of government and legislative affairs, MSA, and members agreed to use that letter.

3. St. Paul resolution - Palermo introduced Rachel Kircher, student board president, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS), and McKenzie Barth, student, CFANS, presenting a [resolution on improvements to the St. Paul campus](#) on behalf of Shantal Pai, senator, who could not be in attendance.

Kircher provided an overview of the resolution, noting that St. Paul campus lags behind the East and West Bank campuses in resources such as Boynton Health, the Aurora Center, and food service. Often when visiting Boynton Health on the St. Paul campus, said Barth, students are then referred to the East Bank campus location due to the limited services available. The operating hours of the St. Paul Student Center are also an issue, with the food facilities often closed, she added.

Nick Ames said that graduate students housed on the St. Paul campus have expressed concern with student fees, specifically the Rec Center fee, since the St. Paul gym is a “sub-par” facility. Since many graduate students work and study on the St. Paul campus, and few undergraduates do, this issue has not gotten much attention, he added.

4. System-wide sexual assault resources letter - Palermo provided an overview of a [letter drafted from the SSCC to the Budget 5](#) requesting additional resources for system-wide sexual assault resources for students, and asked the committee to provide feedback before it was sent. Committee members did not have any further suggestions, and voted to approve the letter as

written.

5. Approval of Student Senate docket - Palermo reviewed the draft Student Senate docket for May 4, 2017, and asked the committee for feedback or changes. Hearing none, the committee voted and approved the Student Senate docket.

6. Transition reports - Maddie Schwartz reminded the committee that the deadline for completion of transition reports for the new SSCC reps was Monday, and asked members to have it completed by Tuesday.

7. Approval of chair, vice chair, ranking senator spring stipends - Members of the SSCC, less stipend-receiving members, voted to approve the full stipend amounts for the chair, vice chair, and ranking senator.

8. Introduction of the senior vice president for finance and operations - Palermo welcomed Brian Burnett, senior vice president of finance and operations, Office of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations.

Burnett introduced himself to the committee, noting that he has a son currently enrolled here, and he first became familiar with the institution as a parent. His PhD is in finance, and he taught finance for a number of years before working in administration in the University of Missouri system. This is a challenging time for the University, he said, with funding challenges at the Minnesota state capitol, and other states making cuts to higher education. Currently, he reported, the legislature is recommending funding \$20-\$30 million of the University's requested \$147 million in state appropriations, though the University is attempting to advocate for increased funding to legislators. Additionally, a national search is underway for a permanent vice president and chief information officer for the Office of Information Technologies, reported Burnett, and another will soon be launched for the permanent vice president for University Services.

Members of the SSCC sent Senior Vice President Burnett questions ahead of the meeting, and he responded as follows:

- Q: Recently, the Senate Committee on Student Affairs, which has a reporting line to this committee, sent you and others on the Budget 5 a letter requesting additional resources for system campuses for their student mental health efforts. What is the plan for supporting mental health on system campuses moving forward?

Burnett said that while discussions about the budget were very preliminary and fluid, he hoped to fund those requests and was sensitive to this important issue. Specifically, he said, he understood the committee's perspective that the University needs to solve system-wide issues and understand the different needs of each campus, though funding does depend on the final state appropriation.

- Q: Also, in that same letter from SCSA, bridge safety was mentioned; the committee asked that the University prioritize reconstruction of the pedestrian level of the Washington Avenue Bridge on the Twin Cities campus, and complete an assessment of the bridge and nearby structures, in order to potentially add suicide barriers. What is the University's plan to address these concerns?

Burnett noted that he had been personally touched by suicide. He said that based on the data, he was currently in favor of focusing funds on preventative care for those with mental health concerns, as installing barriers to the bridge was a complicated process, and would require \$3 million, which is not currently funded. Still, he said, his team is looking into this and other possibilities for the bridge. Burnett reported that the Senate Committee on Finance and Planning (SCFP) had also discussed this issue, and seemed in favor of restricting access to the pedestrian level of the bridge at night. Other structures are also used when students seek to do themselves harm, said Burnett, including nearby parking structures, and the University should therefore be thoughtful about the analysis of these options and their limitations.

- Q: What is your office's attitude toward University divestment due to political or social pressures (i.e. divestment in Defense Department research, etc.)?

Burnett replied that when the University manages endowments, it has a duty to maximize returns, a fiduciary responsibility to donors who gave gifts to the institution. It is difficult to build a portfolio without investments that may offend someone, he said. These funds largely support faculty and students, and it is important to look at this issue on a macro-level, he added.

- Q: There has been a recent outpouring of emails from a University of MN email account stating that certain University graduate TA's and RA's were overpaid during the last fall semester and need to refund the University. What is your office's stance on asking students to refund the University due to an internal oversight, with no apology for the oversight or burden to students?

Burnett reported that he had not heard about this issue. However, the University gets audited on how it spends every dollar, and so overpayments or underpayments to employees need to be reconciled, which is a typical business practice, he said.

- Q: What is your stance on information security at the University? What is being done to prevent scams (potentially) from reoccurring?

Burnett replied that Dual Factor Authentication, optional right now for students, helps to avoid phishing scams that may target students. He said that it would be helpful if student government got more students to enroll; currently, about 11% of students have opted in.

Lauren Mitchell noted, in response to Burnett's overview of the Washington Avenue Bridge

issue, that research shows that suicide is impulsive, and that many who attempt suicide never attempt it again; this points to suicide barriers being valuable. Mitchell then asked, what arguments are most effective when asking the legislature for increased funding for the University? Burnett responded that the legislature should understand that funds given to the University are an investment in the state, and not an expense, as the University is training the workforce of the future. For example, he said, General Mills recruits students from our institution. The University of Minnesota is a good value, because it is both a research university and a land grant institution wrapped into one; these are usually separated into two institutions, like for example, the University of Iowa and Iowa State University. Therefore, Burnett said, we have a very efficient model, as the state gets a better return on their investment. During these budget negotiations, the University brought students and alumni to talk to the legislature about the benefit the institution brings to the state. 50 out of the 201 state legislators even went to school at the University, he noted.

Another bill currently making it's way through the legislature, said Burnett, would direct the University to make student fees optional; some legislators have said that if this does not pass, student fees would then be deducted from the state appropriation, which would have significant negative impacts on student services.

Fanda Yang asked if it was possible to expand the operating hours of the Campus Circulator, to better support graduate students travelling between campuses over break periods. Burnett responded that he would look into this and report back to the committee.

Palermo mentioned that the SSCC would be sending Burnett's office a letter requesting funding for system-wide sexual assault resources for students. She asked how likely it was that this could be a priority in the University's budget. Burnett responded that he would take this issue under serious consideration as soon as he received the letter, and that he would do his best to prioritize these needs. This is a national issue of importance, he said, and certainly an issue important to the University. Looking at President Eric Kaler's response to the recent boycott in Gopher Athletics, he drew a hard line in support of sexual assault victims, and many students voiced support for that approach. Holleran noted that on system campuses, there is a significant impact for students when investments are made in these types of services; at UMD, the Women's Center does a lot to support victims of sexual assault. He said he'd like to see this issue high on the priority list for the budget.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Barbara Irish
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