

Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC)
December 14, 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 reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration, or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** Discussion with Council of Graduate Students (COGS), Postdoctoral Association (PDA), Professional Student Government (PSG), and Minnesota Student Association Student Leaders; Brainstorm How to Move Forward the Grand Challenges Research Effort]

PRESENT: Joseph Konstan (chair), Greta Friedemann-Sanchez (vice chair), Catherine French, Bill Arnold, Les Drewes, Dan Feeney, Jennifer Goodnough, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Wendy St. Peter, Abimbola Asojo, Robert Blair, Sheri Breen, Tabitha Grier-Reed, Peggy Nelson, Ned Patterson, Amy Pittenger, Peter Tiffin

REGRETS: Robert Kudrle

ABSENT: Michael Oakes

GUESTS: Lauren Mitchell, president, COGS; Mike Wilson, vice president, PDA; Rachel Cardwell, president, Professional Student Government; Trish Palermo, president, Minnesota Student Association; Academic Affairs Committee Director Catalina Anampa Castro, Minnesota Student Association; Special Assistant to the Provost for Grand Challenges Research Raymond Duvall

1. Discussion with Council of Graduate Students (COGS), Postdoctoral Association (PDA), Professional Student Government (PSG), Minnesota Student Association (MSA) student leaders: Professor Konstan welcomed the student leaders who were invited to meet with the FCC to talk about what is on their minds, their priorities, etc. In addition, Professor Konstan requested each student leader share something positive that is happening within their organization.

To begin, Lauren Mitchell, president, [COGS](#), said a positive thing that she has noticed this year is the engagement of graduate students on important issues such as sexual misconduct, access to student mental health resources, and a proposed provision to the Tax Cut and Jobs Act (TCJA) that would have graduate student tuition waivers be counted as income, and, therefore, be subject to taxes, to name a few. COGS general assembly meetings are being well-attended, said Ms. Mitchell, to the point where there are not enough chairs for all those attending. In Ms. Mitchell's opinion, there is an unprecedented level of interest and involvement on the part of graduate students in what is happening on campus.

Moving on, Ms. Mitchell highlighted COGS priorities for the 2017 – 2018 academic year, which include:

- Measuring and maintaining campus mental health services.
- Sensible reporting of sexual misconduct.

According to Ms. Mitchell there was a third priority, opposing the tax exclusion of tuition assistance for graduate and Ph.D. students that had been in the TCJA, but, fortunately, the final version of this bill did not include this provision so this is no longer an issue for COGS.

Ms. Mitchell then proceeded to go into significant detail about each of the current priorities, some of which is included in the respective resolutions drafted by COGS on these topics: [Measuring and Maintaining Adequate Campus Mental Health Services](#) and [Student Employees Should Not Be Mandatory Reporters](#). In light of time, Professor Konstan thanked Ms. Mitchell and her graduate student colleagues for taking a stand on these important issues.

Next, Professor Konstan turned to Mike Wilson, vice president, [PDA](#), to share the PDA's priorities for this year. Dr. Wilson began by clarifying that postdoctoral students are categorized by the University as professionals in training, not students. As a result, postdocs have different needs than graduate students. The PDA, he noted, exists to provide social policy and professional support to postdocs and to advocate for excellence as part of their postdoc experience. This year's PDA priorities include:

- Normalizing the benefits disparity between postdoctoral fellows and postdoctoral associates.
- Work with the University to comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) after the University increased postdoctoral salaries to a minimum threshold, which had implications for some postdocs resulting in early termination of employment.
- Develop best practices for postdoc mentorship.
- Create a Graduate Student and Postdoc Diversity Alliance.

Professor Konstan asked about the early termination of employment issue and whether that was solely triggered by the FLSA increases. Dr. Wilson said early termination is not a new issue for postdocs, but it was significantly magnified by the FLSA salary increases. The solution to this issue has been to identify the source of funds before making a commitment.

Since the Graduate School has been made the official home for postdocs, have postdocs seen any changes, asked Professor Blair? At one time the University had an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs that was housed under the Office of the Vice President for Research, said Dr. Wilson, but that office went away. Unfortunately, the restructuring of the Graduate School several years back set postdoctoral affairs back a lot. Now, the Graduate School is trying to reopen an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

Regarding something positive, Dr. Wilson said the PDA has been restructured so more 'stakeholdership' is now able to happen at the college level, which has served to make the PDA more inclusive. The PDA is also very appreciative of the colleges that are excited to work with them, which in turn has motivated many postdocs to get more involved.

Professor Drewes asked Dr. Wilson whether the PDA has any connection with Duluth postdocs. Dr. Wilson said it has been difficult for the PDA to connect with Duluth postdocs. With that said, the PDA hopes to identify Duluth postdocs to serve on the PDA.

Professor Konstan thanked Dr. Wilson for the information he shared, and then welcomed Rachel Cardwell, president, [PSG](#). After a round of introductions, Ms. Cardwell highlighted issues the PSG is working on this year:

- Work to ensure the professional student voice is being heard related to the President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct.
- Work to raise awareness about the GOP tax proposal that would have eliminated the tax exclusion of tuition assistance for graduate and Ph.D. students, which effectively would have made their tuition discounts taxable income.
- Create an exploratory committee to look into the issues students who are trying to get joint student degrees face, e.g., credits not transferring, lack of understanding about what credits are needed to obtain a joint degree.
- Work to involve Duluth students in PSG.
- Work with other student groups to push for protection and support of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Travel Ban-impacted students.

Has student mental health resources and services been a priority for PSG like it has for a number of other student groups, asked Professor Patterson? Ms. Cardwell said it has definitely been a topic of conversation and PSG is working to have representation on the various committees across campus dealing with this issue.

In response to a question from Professor Konstan about students in two programs, a graduate program and a professional program, and also students in professional programs that are housed under the Graduate School, Ms. Cardwell said this has been a point of discussion for the last few months. Currently, discussions are underway about how to continue funding both PSG and COGS. There are a number of student councils with "mixed students," and based on her research the student councils with mixed students do not differentiate between graduate and professional students. The biggest problem PSG is seeing has to do with joint degree students who are not getting their issues addressed.

Regarding something positive for PSG students, Ms. Cardwell said seeing both graduate and professional students come together to fight for common issues such as the proposed changes to the GOP tax plan. Also, PSG's attempts to involve Duluth professional students.

Finally, Professor Konstan turned to Trish Palermo, president, MSA, to talk about the issues MSA is working on this year. Ms. Palermo thanked the FCC for the invitation to meet with the committee because there are two issues MSA is interested in partnering with the FCC on and these include:

- Immigration policy changes.
- Syllabi database.

Ms. Palermo began by talking about the [open letter](#) its executive board drafted in conjunction with COGS general assembly and the executive board of the PSA urging President Kaler and the Board of Regents to take tangible action in response to the DACA repeal. The letter encourages the University to be proactive by giving faculty the flexibility to implement long-distance learning accommodations for students on a case-by-case basis impacted by DACA, TPS and/or the travel ban. In addition to signing the letter, Ms. Palermo asked members to share their ideas on how to move this issue forward. To date, the letter has almost 250 faculty signatures and her plan is to deliver it to Provost Hanson on December 18. Members then took a few minutes to review the letter, which Professor Konstan projected on the screen.

Ms. Palermo noted that when she attended last week's Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) meeting, the suggestion was made to ask the administration for changes to the following policies: 1) [Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#) and 2) [Grading and Transcripts: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#) to include language pertaining to students impacted by DACA, TPS and/or the travel ban so they do not receive failing grades and so they can receive reimbursement.

Professor Konstan asked Professor Goodnough, chair, SCEP, if she is aware of any current administrative hurdles within programs that would prevent faculty from making accommodations like those mentioned by Ms. Palermo. Professor Goodnough confirmed SCEP talked about this at its last meeting and felt that language could be added to the policies to make them clearer. She added that the sense she got from the committee was that faculty are supportive of making accommodations when they are able to do so. Professor Goodnough agreed with Professor Konstan that faculty already have the flexibility to make accommodations in most instances if they want to. Professor Konstan added that even if faculty have this flexibility, articulating support for it probably would be a good idea. Professor Arnold voiced concern about putting this type of language in University policy because there are no guarantees that all accommodations will always be able to be made. Ms. Cardwell added that PSG discussed this issue and liked the fact that the language in the letter is fairly loose – “to remove barriers,” which gives leeway and does not guarantee accommodations will be made. Additionally, said Ms. Cardwell, PSG liked the letter because it provides students who are faced with uncertainty with some reassurance that the institution has their back. Professor Konstan said he sees both sides of the issue and agreed with Professor Arnold that the institution has to be careful about the messages it sends because it does not want to give students the impression they do not have to worry under any circumstance.

At the conclusion of this discussion, the sense of the FCC was: 1) that there should be no unreasonable barriers placed on faculty preventing them from making accommodations for students who cannot, for one reason or another, physically complete a degree onsite because of these issues, and 2) that once a student has gotten far enough along in their program that the right thing to do is to help them finish that program whenever possible. FCC members were supportive of the open letter. Professor Breen suggested before delivering this letter to Provost Hanson that it should be cleaned up and include full names and titles of those who signed it. Ms. Palermo agreed and said she is aware that not everyone who endorsed the letter provided all the information they had been asked to provide.

Professor Tiffin commented that while the letter talks about removing barriers, most faculty do not think there are barriers. The spirit of the letter is about faculty putting students first and so he asked Ms. Palermo when she delivers the letter to Provost Hanson to think about how she presents the faculty's perspective on providing support. In his opinion, the vast majority of faculty will do what they can to support students. Ms. Palermo thanked Professor Tiffin for his feedback and said the goal of the letter is to be more transparent about faculty support for this issue. Professor Goodnough added that it will be important to keep in mind that if the Leave of Absence policy were to be expanded to cover students impacted by DACA, TPS and/or the travel ban, a barrier could be access to catalogues and program requirements. Therefore, if the Liberal Education requirements are changed in the next couple years, it might allow students who left the University under the aforementioned circumstances to not be held to a new set of standards when they return. In her opinion, there are barriers that while not necessarily faculty-related, could have implications for this issue.

Moving on, Catalina Anampa Castro, director, Academic Affairs Committee, MSA, said another priority for MSA this year is to develop a centralized resource so students can have access to class syllabi, particularly now that the course guide no longer exists. The goal of this project is to increase student awareness of what they are getting themselves into, e.g., help students know what their workload will be like when selecting their classes so they can plan accordingly. This resource is something the Disability Resource Center has advocated for in the past. While some University departments already have a syllabi database, the goal would be to centralize this database and expand it to all departments that do not already have a syllabi database. Ms. Castro asked the committee for their ideas on what MSA should do to garner faculty support for this type of database.

Professor Konstan said this is an issue that has been around for quite some time. It is his understanding that the reason the course guide went away was due in large part to lack of faculty participation, which summarizes the two biggest concerns faculty have about such a database:

1. Past syllabi exist, but future syllabi do not. Past syllabi can be used as a guide for students rather than putting the burden on faculty of creating a syllabus several months in advance of actually teaching a class. Recognizing this fact will likely result in more faculty support and participation.
2. The process for putting syllabi into a central database needs to be made as easy/automatic as possible for faculty or they will not participate.

Professor Goodnough, chair, SCEP, added that Canvas has the functionality to allow syllabi to be viewed by anyone with a X.500 address, and SCEP supports making this feature available. More recently, she said she has heard that the newest PeopleSoft update will bring back the equivalent of the course guide. However, because the course guide feature in PeopleSoft was not used a lot, SCEP did not support the idea of a syllabi database, but there was support for encouraging best practices around providing syllabi.

Professor Tiffin suggested that the default be that the syllabus be automatically available, and making it the faculty member's responsibility to opt out.

Any database that is created, said Professor Konstan, needs to be a historical database. Additionally, in order for this initiative to be effective, the concept of what a syllabus is will likely have to change.

To address this issue, noted Dr. Wilson, some Minnesota state colleges require their syllabi to include the learning objectives of courses. In theory, said Professor Konstan, the learning objectives are usually in the long-form course descriptions rather than the syllabi. A syllabus would then tie learning objectives to how it would be carried out in a given course.

Professor Pittenger asked whether students are wanting to know about the workload for a course, or specific assignments and exam dates. If it is the later, many faculty are hesitant to provide this information early on. Ms. Anampa Castro said the goal is to give students a sense of the workload, e.g., writing intensive courses, frequency of exams.

Professor Konstan suggested thinking about approaching this request in two ways:

- Make syllabi available by default to anyone in the University community and archive them for up to three years for the purpose of informing students about the content of courses.
- Have students collect syllabi for their courses, and have students set up their own database with this information. [While this approach would seem to be fair use of course syllabi, this would need to be confirmed with a copyright librarian.]

Professor Konstan summarized the message from the committee, which was for students to push forward with this initiative. It was also suggested that the issue, when ready, be brought to SCEP for further discussion and possible endorsement.

Professor Grier-Reed commented that in light of ongoing changes to the course registration system, there should be a way to make course information more informative for students.

Professor Konstan thanked all the student groups for sharing their priorities and issues with the FCC today.

2. Brainstorm how to move the Grand Challenges Research effort forward: Professor Konstan welcomed Special Assistant to the Provost for Grand Challenges Research Raymond Duvall, who was invited to talk about next steps for the Grand Challenges Research effort. Before beginning, Professor Konstan called for a round of introductions.

Dr. Duvall thanked the committee for the opportunity to meet with them. To date, two cycles of the Grand Challenges Research initiatives have been completed. The Strategic Plan, as members may recall, calls for the University to emerge as a recognized leader nationally and internationally in addressing current grand challenges, said Dr. Duvall. He then proceeded to provide background information about the Grand Challenges Research endeavor.

The first Grand Challenges Research cycle called for proposals for relatively small seed grant proposals of around \$100,000 or less for specific projects. Phase one also invited proposals for

somewhat larger amounts (up to \$250,000) from groups composed centrally of researchers from multiple colleges to address each of the five Grand Challenges. Then, in phase/year two, the focus was on two of the five Grand Challenges, Assuring Clean Water and Sustainable Ecosystems and Fostering Just and Equitable Communities. Of the 70 pre-proposals that were received in year two, 16 of the 70 were asked to submit full proposals, and, in the end, six of the 16 full proposals were supported with larger dollar amount commitments. Also, in year two, there was a second type of competition, which was different in that it invited members of the faculty to submit proposals as individuals rather than as teams in pursuit of the University forming Grand Challenges Research Scholar Collaboratives. This competition identified 12 faculty members that comprised two collaboratives, one focusing on the Grand Challenge of Fostering Just and Equitable Communities, and the other Assuring Clean Water and Sustainable Ecosystems.

Right now, said Dr. Duvall, brainstorming is underway about how to move forward with phase three. With that said, he invited FCC members to share their ideas/thoughts. In response to a question from Professor St. Peter about the most successful projects so far, Dr. Duvall said it is really too early to answer this question, unfortunately.

Have there been any best practices developed around how to form and work effectively as a team, asked Professor Patterson. He added that he is one of six faculty from the University of Minnesota Academic Health Center who are participating in the University of Colorado's [Leadership for Innovative Team Science \(LITeS\) program](#), which focuses on how to work effectively as a team. Dr. Duvall thanked Professor Patterson for this suggestion and noted that assessment of best practices for interdisciplinary collaboration is a central component of the Grand Challenges Research initiative.

Professor French suggested the University hold forums where faculty can meet each other with the hope of fostering collaborative partnerships. There needs to be more opportunities for faculty that will facilitate interdisciplinary research. In response, Dr. Duvall asked members to mark their calendars for April 18 when there will be a day long forum (Grand Challenges Expo) that will take place in Coffman Memorial Union. This will be an open forum that will not only highlight some of the Grand Challenges Research achievements that have been made thus far, but also be a space for meeting other faculty and possibly fostering collaborative partnerships. It is important to keep in mind that the Provost's Office is not a center for funding research, but rather the goal of Grand Challenges Research awards is about trying to lead institutional change. All the Grand Challenges projects are being asked to take a lead role in helping to reposition the University of Minnesota. These are not won and done projects, but rather intended to position the University to be more prominent with respect to the work around the Grand Challenges on a sustained basis. Professor French followed up and suggested the University offer interdisciplinary activities on a more regular basis. While the April 18 forum sounds great, these types of opportunities need to be offered more regularly. Professor Grier-Reed said two areas related to Professor French's point are team science and implementation science. There is a science to teams and implementation, which could have a broader impact.

Recognizing that the Grand Challenges Research initiative is one part of [Driving Tomorrow](#), the Twin Cities' campus strategic plan, Professor Drewes said that it will be important not to lose sight of the research opportunities across the State of Minnesota and the University of Minnesota system, e.g., Lake Superior, mining. In his opinion, there are several opportunities to engage resources outside of the Twin Cities. Dr. Duvall agreed and added that involving faculty on the system campuses is also a goal of this initiative. The caveat to this is that a subset of the team of PIs have to be Twin Cities' faculty.

Professor Friedemann-Sanchez commented that given a number of changes that have occurred under the Trump administration, e.g., withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, and the [global gag rule](#), could serve to frame future research by looking at the effects of these political decisions.

Dr. Duvall reported that phase two projects will be having “research sprints” in January, where teams of librarians will work with the various funded teams for three intense days to move them forward by helping them position their projects most appropriately. The research sprints will be held on January 9, 10, and 11, 2018.

Professor Tiffin asked for clarification about whether the goal of the Grand Challenges is to think of new ways to try and lead institutional change, e.g., change how the University functions internally, or is the goal to develop new research themes. As previously mentioned, while the goal of the Grand Challenges is not to fund research, most faculty see it as a research funding opportunity. Additionally, Professor Tiffin noted that the University is not the only institution addressing the critical challenges impacting this diverse and changing world and wondered what other institutions are doing. Dr. Duvall said he was invited to speak at a conference in early October where [UCLA hosted a two-day workshop and strategy session for universities currently engaged with or exploring grand challenges](#). He said that many institutions are taking a different direction than the University with many of them approaching grand challenges as “moonshots,” which involves committing to one or two major grand challenges. For example, UCLA has set out as its lead grand challenge to make Los Angeles County fully ecologically sustainable by the year 2050. While the University can learn from what other institutions are doing, following suit would call for a different commitment on the part of the University than is envisioned in the strategic plan, *Driving Tomorrow*.

Professor Konstan recalled that when Grand Challenges Research was first proposed, there was the feeling that there would be obstacles to this type of research occurring. With that said, it would be nice to get a report within the next year that addresses what the University has learned about making larger-scale, interdisciplinary research more doable. Let us make sure the institution is not just looking at their research outcomes, but also its ability to build capacity, which involves removing obstacles, and investing in the right resources.

Building off of what Professors French and Tiffin said, Professor Arnold noted that another important part of this initiative is making connections. The University is a big place where all kinds of amazing research could happen if faculty from across the institution are brought together; for example, speed dating for academics.

In light of time, Professor Konstan thanked Dr. Duvall for a good discussion and hopes the FCC provided him with possible ideas for phase three.

3. **Adjournment:** Hearing no further business, Professor Konstan adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate Office