

**Senate Committee on Student Affairs (SCSA)  
October 17, 2018  
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:** Update on Federal Law Changes with an Emphasis on Immigration; Discussion of the Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN) Year-Two Report; Overview of the Disability Resource Center (DRC)]

**PRESENT:** Kari Volkmann-Carlsen (chair), David Blank, Susan Mantell, Tai Mendenhall, Cody Mikl, Paruj Acharya, Thomas Keller, Sam Rosemark, John Atkins, Rachel Kieffer, Runsheng Ma, Fredrick Ogugua, Emma Olson, Megan Sweet, Kendre Turonie

**REGRETS:** Juan Mogoginta, Oliver Zheng, Elizabeth Pascuzzi, Emily Shim

**ABSENT:** Spencer Marchand

**GUESTS:** Marissa Hill-Dongre, assistant director, International Student and Scholar Services; Ann Freeman, director of campus climate initiatives, Office for Equity and Diversity; Laura Knudson, assistant vice provost, Office for Student Affairs; Shelley Carthen Watson, senior associate general counsel, Office of the General Counsel; Donna Johnson, director, Disability Resource Center (DRC)

**OTHERS:** Lisa Erwin, Lisa Samuelson

Chair Kari Volkmann-Carlsen welcomed the committee, and members introduced themselves.

**1. Update on Federal Law Changes with an Emphasis on Immigration -** Volkmann-Carlsen introduced Marissa Hill-Dongre, assistant director, International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), to give an overview of federal law changes with an emphasis on immigration. Hill-Dongre stated that she works for the University under two roles. She directs the University's Immigration Response Team (IRT) and is the assistant director of ISSS.

Hill-Dongre said that currently there are several issues affecting both employees and students. The IRT has been in place for about a year and acts as a resource for faculty, staff, and students who have questions and issues related to immigration. The IRT is small but works system-wide. Many federal law changes have come through executive action or orders, not through the more traditional legislative process. Many of these proposals have been subject to ongoing lawsuits and challenges. There were a series of policy announcements that came out over this past summer and each are technical in nature. In general, these policies have narrowed the interpretation of certain immigration laws which has created less room for flexibility or conversation between individuals and the government.

Hill-Dongre continued by stating that there have been changes to the way the government determines if a person has failed to maintain their visa status. There is now stricter enforcement of longtime immigration rules, known as the unlawful presence issue, that had not been previously applied to student and scholar visas. This makes it more difficult to change visa status or re-enter the country. The rules themselves have not changed, but the penalties have. The way they are processed have changed as well. Federal immigration agencies have taken on a larger enforcement role rather than emphasize customer service as in the past. These changes are causing a lot of anxiety amongst immigrant populations.

Hill-Dongre said that there are also ongoing long term concerns such as the travel ban and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policies. She stated that it appears as though the DACA issue is headed towards the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). The IRT is working with DACA students to remain enrolled. Tommy Keller asked how many DACA students are currently enrolled on campus. Hill-Dongre said that that sort of information isn't tracked since there is a wide variety of DACA students. The travel ban to select countries was upheld by SCOTUS last summer and is currently in effect. This has had the biggest impact on students and scholars from Iran. The way the travel ban is written makes it very difficult, but not impossible, to get a visa from Iran.

Hill-Dongre said that the IRT is a dedicated group that will work on several of these issues to assist immigrants. The team keeps people informed in order to try and reduce anxiety or fear of losing their status within the United States. There are public benefit programs, like Head Start, for immigrants yet there have been rumors that families are dropping out of these programs out of fear that it could have an impact on their status as well. The IRT has a listserv that sends out routine updates.

Runsheng Ma asked what sort of instance would constitute a violation for an individual on a student visa. Hill-Dongre replied that situations vary from person to person, but employment can play a major role, especially while in F1 visa status. Those such individuals should speak to an ISSS advisor. Many of those rules can also be found on their website.

Volkman-Carlsen asked if there are campus or system challenges impacting the University's ability to address international student needs. Hill-Dongre said that the size of the University and its decentralized nature can cause barriers. She said that her office making connections sooner with students is important. The IRT worked to get the "DREAM Fund" set up, which awards small grants to DACA students who face financial difficulty and can help defer costs for renewing their DACA paperwork.

## **2. Discussion of the Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN) Year-Two Report -**

Volkman-Carlsen introduced Ann Freeman, director of campus climate initiatives, Office for Equity and Diversity (OED); Laura Knudson, assistant vice provost, Office for Student Affairs; and Shelley Carthen Watson, senior associate general counsel, Office of the General Counsel, to give an overview of the Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN) Year-Two Report.

Freeman began the presentation by stating that currently the BRRN is an entity that only handles issues on the Twin Cities campus. The BRRN was created by a charge from President Kaler in February 2016 to respond to bias and hate incidents on campus. The BRRN furthers the goal of a campus climate that is welcoming, inclusive and respectful to all by responding to reports of bias incidents on the Twin Cities Campus. Executive oversight is provided by the executive vice president and provost, and the OED vice president. A 21-member team is charged with day-to-day responsibilities of responding to bias incidents on the Twin Cities campus that have been reported to the BRRN. Six of those team members serve as staff leads. A faculty and student consultation and advisory group provides input, feedback, and perspective to the BRRN as well.

Freeman further stated that the BRRN's main duties include:

- Refer those who report incidents to appropriate campus offices that can effectively respond through investigation, educational coaching, or other resources, depending on the nature of the incident
- Refer students, faculty, and staff to support resources
- Log all reported incidents and track for trends
- Notify campus leaders of ongoing bias incidents and trends
- Educate and consult about the BRRN to campus groups
- Inform the campus community about their work through informational meetings and annual reports

The BRRN does not conduct investigations, take disciplinary action, or impinge on free speech rights and academic freedom.

Carthen Watson stated that the BRRN has recently completed a summary of findings after year two of the program. She stated that overall, things are going pretty well. Between March 1, 2017, and April 30, 2018, there were 189 reported bias claims of 107 incidents on campus, with some reports being the same incident. For example, the month of February saw 59 reports of the same incident, which was around the all campus vote regarding divestment from Israel. There were various types of methods of bias such as graffiti, posters or signs, and in-person interaction. The vast majority of bias incidents were reported over religion, race, gender, and national origin.

Tai Mendenhall asked about appearance bias (favoring more attractive students) and if those incidents are logged as well. Carthen Watson said that all incidents are counted and addressed, even if it doesn't fall under the category of conventional bias. However, those instances are not logged into the overall report.

Carthen Watson continued by sharing new and continuing trends in bias. There were reports about flyers/stickers combating alt-right or other racist messaging, related to political speech and affiliation, and regarding majority identities. Keller asked if reporting on alt-right messaging or political speech violates a student's right to freedom of speech. Carthen Watson said it can depend on the situation. If posters or signage goes against the University's posting and signage policy, it will be reported. That policy outlines the appropriate places and methods for displaying messages.

Knudson then spoke about recommendations for the University and included the following:

- Increase resources to provide education and training on key topics
- Collaborate more closely with those working to improve campus climate
- Increase awareness of and trust in the BRRN to encourage its use when witnessing or experiencing hate or bias incidents
- Continue to evaluate the best way to provide information on trends and statistics to the campus community

Knudson further requested that committee members help spread awareness of the BRRN within their own networks. John Atkins said that including these resources at orientation or on One Stop might help raise awareness. Lisa Erwin said that the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) has a similar group called the Campus Climate Response Team and she will present details about that group later in the year.

Volkman-Carlson asked if the group has seen a perceived improvement in climate or if it is too early to say. Freeman agreed that it is too early to tell as they do not have specific analytics or surveys. Carthen Watson said that the University doesn't operate in a vacuum and that nationwide trends have an impact on events on campus.

**3. Overview of the Disability Resource Center (DRC)** - Volkman-Carlson introduced Donna Johnson, director, Disability Resource Center (DRC), to provide an overview of the DRC and its recent changes and challenges. The DRC is situated in the Twin Cities and services faculty, students, staff, and guests with services for those with disabilities. The DRC is housed in the McNamara Alumni Center and has eight units:

- Student Access
- Document Conversion
- Computer Accommodations Program
- Physical Access
- UReturn/Employees Services
- Interpreting/Captioning Unit
- Testing Center and Access Assistance
- Outreach/Education and Training

Johnson further stated that the DRC services have employees on all system campuses. The office has over seventy full time staff as well as forty to sixty student workers at any given time.

The DRC is having its largest challenge in providing adequate accommodations for its testing center. Johnson stated that the number of students requesting their services has grown almost every year. When Johnson started as director at the DRC in 2009, the center serviced 1,813 students and administered 2,902 tests. This past year, the center serviced 3,736 students and administered 11,769 tests, and numbers are growing. About 11% of the college population have a disability, and the DRC is currently only serving about 8%. According to Boynton Health, about one third of the University population has a diagnosed mental or physical health condition. These conditions are both acute and chronic in nature. Many students have multiple conditions.

Students with non-apparent disabilities make up more than 84% of the students registered with the DRC.

Johnson continued by stating that the primary conditions they see in students deal with mental health, attention deficit/hyperactivity (ADHD), and learning disability disorders. These three areas account for 71% of all reported disabilities. Students' awareness of the services available to them has increased the number of students requesting services from the DRC. The decreasing stigma around having a mental health condition is also leading to more students reporting that they have the need for such services. Mendenhall agreed that so many students are developing and have a hard time dealing with stress and anxiety.

Johnson further stated that the one service that has seen a decline in request has been for interpreters. She attributes this to deaf and hard of hearing students preferring to use captioning services more than interpreters. Vendors for captioning are getting cheaper and are paid for by the DRC.

Providing access for over 11,000 exams last year is creating a real challenge for the center. The DRC has resorted to renting space at the Graduate Hotel and the McNamara Alumni Center to provide proctorial testing space. Johnson noted that testing accommodations are not the same across the Big Ten. The University provides far more services than peer institutions. She said that in order to accommodate so many requests, staff often give up their offices for extended periods of time. Volkmann-Carlsen asked if these space issues have impacted the timing for taking tests. Johnson replied that through creative scheduling, there has been little delay in administering tests in a timely manner.

Mikl asked how the DRC manages the tension of stigma around having a disability. Johnson said that the center is careful about the mass information that they send to the community. She said they often utilize Facebook for promotional materials. Mendenhall asked about departments having to pay for media transcriptions because of high costs. Johnson said that the DRC can help accommodate costs. Mendenhall followed up by stating that there needs to be a more systemized way to notify instructors earlier of students disability issues. Johnson said that it is the students responsibility to report their disability or accommodation to the instructor in a timely manner. Accommodations are not retroactive, even if an accommodation letter is dated earlier. The DRC is looking to offer more faculty training in this area.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Chris Kwapick  
University Senate Office