

Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS)
June 22, 2020
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 from OCM]

PRESENT: Mark Bergen (chair), Keith Brown, Dave Crane, Sehoya Cotner; Michael Dunst; Maki Isaka, Roberta Kehne, Sandy Mand

REGRETS: Scott Abernathy, Todd Arnold, James Cotner, Dave Hutton, J.D. Walker

ABSENT: Andrew Jenks, Abby Skapyak

1. Update from the Office of Classroom Management (OCM)

Chair Mark Bergen called the meeting to order and turned the floor over to Dave Crane, who informed members that OCM had been looking at physical distances in classrooms with regard to the recommendations for social distancing. They modeled several different scenarios and looked at ADA requirements as well. In order to accommodate social distancing, capacities are down around 75-80%, he said. They are also looking at air flow; some rooms are very old and do not have adequate ventilation for the situation. Finally, Crane noted that in-room technology is a consideration, with so many courses offering hybrid models. OCM is working with the provost to add additional technology to about 200 rooms to meet these needs.

Classroom layouts have been updated to reflect the six feet between each student. They are currently working to replace the in-room layout documentation with these new ones. OCM's recommendation is that rooms will be assigned by exception for any courses that have more than 30 students enrolled; larger classrooms will be used to accommodate smaller class sizes. There are about five classrooms that can support 50+ students under the new guidelines, he noted, and only one that can support 100 students. Placards will be placed on seats that should not be used and cannot be removed. Some small classrooms may be used for storage to move some furniture out, but storage space is limited. Floor stickers will be used to indicate placement of moveable seating.

Sandy Mand asked if OCM had looked into using stadiums and other large event spaces to accommodate large classes. Crane confirmed that they were, adding that they were also looking at nearby retail and business spaces.

Maki Isaka passed on several concerns from a colleague:

- Who's responsible if an outbreak of covid-19 on campus happens? Crane responded that the University would look to the Minnesota Department of Health to do contact tracing.

- What kind of actual backup help instructors can rely on regarding physical elements of the classroom setting? Crane explained that technology questions are fielded through a call center model in partnership with the Office of Information Technology (OIT). They recognize that there will be an increased need for tech support with remote and hybrid classes, and they are working to tweak the system to meet the demand. Keith Brown reported that one of the things OIT is very curious about is the possibility of the traditional school day and week being expanded. They are thinking about whether they need to provide support during days and times that they traditionally do not have as much support available.
- What about masks? As it stands, the University is not mandating them, but instructors can mandate them in their classes. What if students do not feel comfortable being around people not wearing masks? Crane and Brown acknowledged that there were challenges around this issue. Brown noted that OIT was investigating how an instructor wearing a mask would interface with technology.
- Will instructors be required to switch to remote teaching? Crane said that he thought that after Thanksgiving there was that expectation, yes. He theorized that instructors will probably also need to be prepared to accommodate students who have been exposed to or tested positive for covid-19 and need to go into quarantine for 14 days.

Bergen wondered who had choice with regards to in-person versus online classes. Faculty had been empowered to make that choice, he said, but what about students?

Brown asked Crane if most of the departments are adjusting the number of in-person courses they are offering according to OCM's modeling. Mand said that classes in her department had.

Brown then asked, with regard to the extra technology that will likely be installed in classrooms to facilitate remote learning, whether this was a long-term investment. These systems are expensive, he pointed out, and will need to be replaced at some point, if the idea is to make this a permanent change to these classrooms. Crane explained that some of the new technology should be able to accommodate upgrades easily, and these will go into the normal life cycle replacement plan. For other technology, OCM tries to follow the plan that the technology requires, and makes decisions about deferred maintenance and what that impact is to reliability as necessary.

Bergen said he felt it was important to speak up for active learning technology, not just as a one time thing, but as a fundamental change in how we educate.

Mand observed that OCM had expanded classroom availability into the evening hours and weekend hours to accommodate more sections due to social distancing requirements. She noted that most students had already registered for classes, and wondered how classes would be moved to those expanded slots, if necessary. Bergen said he had received a message from his unit informing faculty that if they want to change the day or time of their class, the currently enrolled students would need to approve the decision.

2. Critical Disability Studies Collective Letter

Next, Bergen called members' attention to a letter that the Critical Disability Studies Collective had sent to the provost, asking that the default mode for fall be changed to online. Bergen said this item was just for the committee's information, and asked if anyone had any questions or comments about it. Brown commented that if this change was going to be made, it would be good to do it soon so that OIT would have more time to assist with those faculty who had not previously planned to tack online. Isaka noted that the letter had already been sent to the administration and the Board of Regents, but that it was still collecting signatures, if faculty wanted to sign it.

3. Other Business

Members then discussed the issue of international students who may opt to stay in their home country during the semester, and the complexities created by teaching across many time zones.

A discussion then ensued about other peripheral concerns, such as transportation to and between the campuses. Crane stated that with social distancing guidelines, each campus connector can only support about six students at a time, so going from the Minneapolis to the St. Paul campus will be very challenging.

Hearing no further discussion, Bergen thanked members for their presence during the summer and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office