Senate Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT)
September 14, 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:** Welcome and Introductions; University Senate Governance Orientation; Ex Officio Positions on SCIT; Office of Information Technology Overview/Letter of Support; Availability and Access to Remote Technologies for Students: Promoting Equity]

PRESENT: Geoffrey Ghose (chair), Keith Brown, John Butler, Brent Christensen, Santiago Fernandez-Gimenez, Bernard Gulachek, Kristin Janke, Pilar Karaca-Mandic, Lindsey Konerza, Kelvin Lim, Robert Rubinyi, Daniela Sandler, Cassandra Scharber, Engin Sungar, Rielle Swanson, Yoichi Watanabe, Matthew Weber

GUESTS: Robert McMaster, vice provost and dean, Office of Undergraduate Education, LeeAnn Melin, associate vice provost for student success, Office of Undergraduate Education

REGRETS: Jonathan Koffel, Zachary Riffle, Whitney Taha Frakes

ABSENT: Gustav Kuhnen

Welcome and Introductions
Professor Geoffrey Ghose, chair, welcomed committee members and asked for a round of introductions. He shared that Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Croson will be attending the November 9, 2020, SCIT meeting. He said the provost hopes to share in a committee discussion regarding successes and challenges of online instruction currently being experienced by the University community.

University Senate Governance Orientation
Next, Geanette Poole, senate associate, University Senate Office, provided a brief committee orientation. The review was provided in order to describe the responsibilities and charge of the committee, familiarize members with meeting logistics, and outline the function and structure of University Senate governance.

Ex Officio Positions on SCIT
Professor Ghose then asked committee members to discuss who they thought would best serve the committee as ex officio members. The ex officio positions called for in the committee charge are as follows:

- Vice president for information technology and chief information officer (appointed by the Office for Information Technology (OIT)) - currently filled by Bernard Gulachek

- Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost (appointed by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost) - position open - formerly filled by Emily Ronning
- Center for Educational Innovation, Office of eLearning (appointed by the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost) - currently filled by Robert Rubinyi
- University librarian, Twin Cities campus - currently filled by John Butler (as the University librarian's designee)
- Chair of the Senate Library Committee (SLC) - currently filled by Kristin Janke, chair, SLC

Ghose recommended adding an ex officio position for the senior director of academic technology from OIT. Santiago Fernandez-Gimenez recommended adding the position of chief information officer in Academic Support Resources (ASR), currently held by Jaime Wascalus, adding that ASR is instrumental in providing services and technology for student registration, degree planning assistance, degree progress, policy compliance, accreditation, and financial aid. Ghose said he would begin the process of amending the committee charge to add the recommended positions.

Office of Information Technology Overview / Letter of Support
Ghose then moved on to the next topic. He said that, because of budgetary constraints, he is concerned that OIT will not be funded to the degree necessary to keep the University running at peak performance level. He said he would like the committee to consider putting forth a statement of support expressing its viewpoint on the unique importance of IT, which has been clearly demonstrated, especially during the pandemic. Ghose then introduced Bernard Gulachek, vice president and chief information officer, OIT.

Gulachek began his presentation titled IT@UMN Overview 2020. He described how indispensable information technology services have become, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an abrupt switch to online instruction in March of 2020. Along with outlining what IT encompasses and how it is organized at the University, Gulachek noted the major IT initiatives that are currently underway and how they have been informed by and changed by the pandemic.

Gulachek said that IT is at the heart of productivity and efficiency at the institution. He added that most of the planet is "floating on IT" right now and it is OIT's job to make sure that services remain available without interruption to the University community.

Ghose then asked Gulachek if he felt OIT was adequately funded given the restraints of the current budget reductions and hiring freezes. Gulachek said that he does feel OIT is appropriately funded at this time, but he knows that could change significantly in the near future. He added that, because some positions in OIT are considered "critical and urgent," he has been able to fill some open positions despite the hiring freeze.

Robert Rubinyi asked Gulachek what changes he expects to see "post-COVID-19" in regard to enrollment pipelines, increased demand for online services, etc. Gulachek invited committee

members to answer Rubinyi's question and share how their instruction methods have changed. Committee members shared their thoughts, which included:

- Making recorded content available outside of "class time" creates flexibility for students to capture content even if they have to miss class.
- Some instructors said that, when the University returns to in-person classes, they will use in person time to focus on one-to-one interactions with students while continuing to provide lecture content online; the hybrid option seems to work well.
- Distance learning could help the University reduce costs if all classes are not meeting in person; more shared spaces, less competition for classroom space, etc.
- Meetings seem to be much more efficient online (with the elimination of travel and parking time).
- Instructors are learning that what they previously thought would be impossible to teach online is actually quite possible.

Availability and Access to Remote Technologies for Students: Promoting Equity
In the interest of time, Ghose thanked Gulachek and moved on to the next topic. He introduced Robert McMaster, vice provost and dean, Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE), and LeeAnn Melin, associate vice provost for student success, OUE. Ghose said he invited McMaster and Melin to provide information on how the University is assisting students who lack the necessary equipment and/or technology to participate fully in remote learning.

McMaster began by saying OUE understood quickly, in Spring 2020, that some students would be at a disadvantage, especially those in rural Minnesota and those who are economically disadvantaged. He noted that the individual colleges stepped up quickly and began loaning laptops to students who needed them. At the University level, support was provided in a number of ways, including the following:

- The University's student emergency fund
- Funds from the federal government's Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES)
- The University's Office of Information Technology (OIT) assisted in providing access to technology to the extent it was able

Next, Melin shared a PowerPoint presentation titled **Availability and Access to Remote Technologies for Students: Promoting Equity**. Information in the presentation was gathered during March and April, 2020, and includes data on:

- the percent of students who do/do not have reliable internet connections
- how emergency funds were distributed
- the number of laptops individual colleges were able to loan to students
- the most significant challenges students are facing with the move to remote learning

Melin then said that OUA also administered an August Check-In Survey to forecast student needs for fall semester. The survey results are listed in Melin's PowerPoint presentation. One of OUA's main objectives is to clearly communicate with students where they can find assistance in obtaining the technology and equipment they need. The OUA's Undergrad Update has the most current information regarding who to contact for technology assistance as well as other

COVID-19 related issues. In response to a question regarding assistance to international students, Melin noted that the [International Student and Scholar Services](#) (ISSS) has provided extensive information regarding resources at orientation sessions for international students.

Next, Gulachek said that some private technology companies are providing low-cost and free internet services but, for the most part, they are located in metropolitan areas. He said the University of Minnesota is working in conjunction with other colleges and universities in the midwest to help identify (to the broadband service providers) which parts of the midwest have significant numbers of students in need of assistance.

Rubinyi asked if the University had considered implementing a minimum standard for what technology devices students must have in order to attend the University. McMaster said he believes that is an important issue for the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) to consider and, as of yet, no minimum standard has been established.

Ghose thanked the guests and said that, as he imagines these will be ongoing issues, he hopes McMaster and Melin will consider attending another meeting later in the academic year. In the interest of time Ghose adjourned the meeting.

Geanette Poole
University Senate Office