

[In these minutes: Discussion of Online learning/education, reports, Student Senate website and blog, Resolution on Student Release Questions]

## **STUDENT SENATE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (SSCC) MINUTES**

**OCTOBER 29, 2009**

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

**PRESENT:** Kathy Julik-Heine (chair), Jeffrey Anderson, Aaron Carlson, Andrew Heairet, Jonathan Lundberg, Andrew Smith, Greg Summers, John Worden.

**REGRETS:** Manjari Govada.

**GUESTS:** Vice Provost Billie Wahlstrom.

### **1. DISCUSSION OF ONLINE LEARNING/EDUCATION WITH VICE PROVOST BILLIE WAHLSTROM**

Billie Wahlstrom, Vice Provost for Distributed Education and Instructional Technology, joined the meeting to discuss the topic of system-wide online education, which is handled by her office. She stated that the goal is not to turn the University into a completely online environment, but to respond to the needs and interests of current and potential students.

She said that 33,000 students took an online course last year, but this number will likely rise due to the economy and more members of the armed forces taking classes while stationed abroad. Of this year's new freshmen, 48.1 percent had already taken an online class.. The University has nine percent, about 1400, courses online or as a hybrid. Hybrid courses have all the didactic work online with the practical application of skills taking place where the student is located. This method is used heavily to qualify practitioners in rural areas as there are 1600 sites for the allied health fields in the state.

Her office has worked to create the Digital Campus to allow for completion of courses as well as degrees and certificates online. However, the first task was to develop one catalog across the campuses with an integrated schedule in PeopleSoft.

She said that the office is also looking to develop courses that are considered 'bottleneck courses' on campus, meaning that they are required for at least one degree but the on-campus seats fill up, therefore preventing some students from completing graduation requirements. The first one being looked at is Introductory Chemistry. Additionally, they want to save money by creating a basic template for future online courses.

She does want to make sure that students taking online courses are working towards degree completion. Therefore they monitor the number of 'D,' 'F,' and 'N' grades assigned in online

and on-campus courses to make sure that there is not a disadvantage to students doing online work.

As for the student experience, Billie Wahlstrom noted that practicing professionals and older adults do not worry about having the typical student experience. Some programs group students into cohorts for degree completion, but their experience is different from a typical student. With undergraduates, more care is taken to make sure that there are student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions similar to on-campus.

Lastly, she said that student input is incorporated through surveys and focus groups, but that students have not participated in the TEL Council or the governance committee for the Digital Campus. She would love to have one undergraduate and one graduate student involved with the TEL Council.

Q: How does the 33,000 online enrollees compare to the University's total student enrollment?

A: It is just a fraction of the total.

Q: How many students complete a degree completely online?

A: Crookston doubled their number to 300 last year, which includes students from all over the world. The Twin Cities had 43 last year. Morris has decided that it will not offer any degree online, just courses.

Q: Which programs offer hybrid courses?

A: Two of the biggest users are Clinical Lab Sciences and Occupational Therapy. Students in these programs come to campus nine times per year for lab work, but all other coursework is online.

Q: Does your office know how many of the 48.1 percent of freshmen who previously took an online course registered for one fall semester?

A: They do not. Most freshmen will likely not take online courses since they enrolled at the University for the face-to-face experience.

Q: How do online courses compare to distance learning and independent study?

A: Distance learning is the old name for online coursework. Whatever the name, this means that students do not come to campus. This coursework is also completed in the same timeframe as an on-campus class. Independent learning courses may involve some work on campus and the timeframe for completion can be longer. These courses may also involve coursework through US mail.

Q: What are the costs for online courses and the opportunities for expansion?

A: More online courses do equal less classrooms, but on-campus space is still required to house instructors and technicians. Infrastructure costs still accrue as online students have the same needs for libraries, writing support, and advising. Since the status of a course, on-campus or online, is not noted on a transcript, both versions require equal quality in the delivery of the service.

Q: How can students in online course provide evaluations or feedback?

A: Feedback can be taken via UMChat, email, or IM. Her office tracks every question received to make sure that repeat issues are being resolved. Regular evaluations are also done of the programs. The University just licensed Quality Matters, a national organization of 400 institutions, to provide on-going evaluations of courses based on an educational rubric.

Q: Will costs for online course decrease in 10 years?

A: Yes, since the courses will be created. However, the cost of instructors will remain.

Q: How is quality control of courses determined?

A: Her office pays attention to the number of dropped courses as well as monitoring the number of 'D,' 'F,' and 'N' grades assigned in online and on-campus courses to make sure that neither course is harder or easier. The normal student evaluation also has a section for online courses. The easiest measure to see is the high number of professional students who pass their board exams after completing an online or hybrid degree.

Q: Is accreditation harder for online degrees?

A: If the online degree has the same high outcome level as an on-campus degree, then accreditation is not an issue, as is evident by the degrees offered by the AHC.

Q: Will student evaluation information be offered for online courses so students can compare the information to courses offered on-campus?

A: As this arrangement has only been offered once, a decision has not been made yet.

Kathy Julik-Heine said that she would provide student names to Billie Wahlstrom for the TEL Council seats.

## **2. CHAIR'S REPORT**

Kathy Julik-Heine provided updates on the following topics:

- Student Senate web page and blog has been created
  - Campus updates will be added
  - Senator feedback will be sought
- Working on approval to send all student email five times per year
- Textbooks

- Student Advisory Council (SAC) is producing a report on publisher practices. She is gathering information on what is required and adherence by publishers
- Vice Provost McMaster noted that the University developed a best practices guide in 2007, but more education is needed for faculty and students on this guide
  - He is scheduled to meet with SSCC in January on this topic
- Student Release Questions
  - Vice Provost McMaster said that faculty are sent an email to release this data
  - Low faculty response rate may be due to multiple factors
    - Faculty do not know why this information is important to students
    - Data can only be accessed through X.500 access
    - Central email might deter faculty responses
  - Vice Provost McMaster suggested that an email from the students to the faculty might generate a higher response rate
  - Information currently on One Stop site is very old so work will take place with the Office of the Registrar to update the responses
  - Resolution to encourage senators to speak with their faculty about releasing responses will be an item on the December 3 Student Senate agenda
- Future Guests
  - November 19 SSCC – Vice Presidents Pfutzenreuter and Rosenstone to speak about the Financing the Future Task Force Report
  - December 3 Student Senate – working to schedule Regent Maureen Ramirez
  - February 18 SSCC – President Bruininks
  - April 1 Student Senate – President Bruininks
- Financing the Future Task Force
  - From this task force report a Steering Committee is being formed
  - Steering Committee will provide ideas on saving administrative costs and redefining the mission of the University
  - Two students were appointed, but both are from the Twin Cities
  - She has asked that a coordinate campus student be appointed as well

### **3. STUDENT ASSOCIATION/ASSEMBLY UPDATES**

Greg Summers said that CSA has brought in speakers on sustainability with the goal of having more student control of this process. There is a campus energy challenge taking place to see which resident hall can save the most energy. A Green Corp member has also spoken to CSA. The campus is looking at supplying students with Kindles so that they can have all their textbooks electronically. Lastly, clubs are planning Halloween activities.

Jonathan Lundberg stated that the UMD held a forum on the campus smoking policy to gather opinions to inform future policy changes. Fall elections took place for open UMDSA positions. Searches are under way for a campus chancellor and vice chancellor.

Jeffrey Anderson reported that GAPSA is holding an election for its Vice President of Finance position and has a Halloween party tonight. It is also hosting a multi-part series on democracy and a family bowling night. There is an annual conference November 14-17 that several GAPSA members will be attending.

Aaron Carlson said that the University filed a court brief regarding disruption to Washington Avenue buildings from the proposed light rail. MSA will be following this action. A new website has also been created – [complain.umn.edu](http://complain.umn.edu) – to focus student feedback for MSA. The Legislative Certificate Program advocates have been selected and are being trained. The spring tax program is growing. Lastly, MSA approved a bylaw amendment on senator attendance to match what the Student Senate approved on October 1.

Kathy Julik-Heine noted that MCSA is dealing with limited course offerings for students and allocation of student technology fee funds. The technology fee allocation was an issue last year and this fall a proposal was sent to MCSA to appoint one student to the allocation committee when this was previously handled entirely by students. MCSA drafted a counter proposal to earmark 20 percent of the total funds for classroom technology, since otherwise there is no way to update these systems. MCSA funded 30 percent of Camp Wellstone, a grassroots training organization which will be on campus November 6-7. All students are welcome to attend.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF STUDENT SENATE WEBSITE AND BLOG**

Members discussed the content of the Student Senate website, the purpose of the blog, and how information should be gathered from the blog. Members agreed that questions can be posed to senators between meetings to solicit feedback on topics.

#### **5. DISCUSSION OF RESOLUTION ON STUDENT RELEASE QUESTIONS**

Kathy Julik-Heine stated that this resolution might not be needed at this time since other methods had been suggested by Vice Provost McMaster. It was agreed that this resolution would be held, but that a resolution to encourage senators to speak with their faculty about releasing responses will be an item on the December 3 Student Senate agenda. A draft letter to faculty from to students would also be presented for action.

Q: Can faculty choose to opt-out rather than opt-in?

A: No. These responses are considered private data by the state since they ask about a person, not just the course. To be considered for opt-out status, the questions would either need to be revised again or the state law would need to be changed.

A member suggested bringing the resolution and email to the University Senate for action as well to raise awareness among that group of faculty.

A member stated that the response from the administration to the December 4, 2008 Student Senate statement said that, “The Senate Committee on Educational Policy and the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs are working together to explore the concept of the University publicizing a list of the top third excellent teachers based on student ratings.” He asked if this action took place.

Kathy Julik-Heine said that follow-up will be done for the next SSCC meeting.

## **6. OTHER BUSINESS**

A member then said that MSA is holding a tabling event on the Washington Avenue Bridge on November 5 to raise awareness of student governance. Coffee and donuts will be provided with MSA funding. He would like the Student Senate to be involved in this as well by providing staffing at the table. He also encouraged each coordinate campus to hold a similar event on their campus.

Another member then suggested that this event be moved to spring semester during the election season as a way to encourage more students to run and vote for positions.

Kathy Julik-Heine suggested that a resolution on this topic be drafted for the December 3 Student Senate meeting.

A member then asked if there will be a second Student Senate orientation for all the new senators.

Becky Hippert said that the Senate Office has a new senator orientation scheduled for November 30. New senators will be invited to this event.

With no further business, Kathy Julik-Heine thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Becky Hippert  
University Senate