

Disabilities Issues Committee
March 31, 2021
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 of Support for Faculty and Staff with Disabilities; Discussion of Alexander Report/Demilitarization]

PRESENT: Ben Munson (chair), Jeff Baier, Kim Doberstein, Mary DeGrote Goering, Gayle Golden, William Goodnow, Samantha Grover, Sanoa Hagen, David Johnson, Donna Johnson, Ryan Machtmes, Jennifer McComas, Emily Norenberg, Dadee Saye

REGRETS: Lars Oddsson, Deena Wassenberg

ABSENT: Jonathan Curoe, Erin Durban, Kiel Harell, Matthew Hoekstra

1. Discussion of Support for Faculty and Staff with Disabilities

Professor Ben Munson, chair, called the meeting to order and noted that this was the final meeting for the academic year. He then invited discussion on supporting faculty and staff with disabilities. Many members of the committee commented on tension between the pressure to take on additional work or responsibility due to a sense of loyalty to or investment in the institution, without feeling supported by the institution.

Munson shared data, provided by Donna Johnson, from UReturn, the arm of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) that handles staff and faculty accommodation requests. According to [the data](#), use of the DRC increased by over 80% in the last five years. Student use nearly doubled, while staff and faculty use increased by almost 70%, with an especially large increase over the last year. Donna Johnson remarked that the increase over the last year could be attributed in part to the pandemic, but the aging workforce was also a factor. When asked, she estimated that the number of instructors using the DRC was about 700 (out of the 3,989 faculty and staff using DRC services), but added that the DRC does not have adequate data to reliably break down faculty versus staff. She also shared the [interactive process for disability accommodation in the workplace](#), which is required by law.

Members mentioned the following additional sources of information on faculty and staff with disabilities:

- Peter Campion, interim director of the Crookston campus DRC, had done his dissertation on faculty with disabilities.
- Gabrielle Mead, assistant director, Equal Education and Affirmative Action, collects voluntary data from faculty and staff with disabilities as part of her work on Section 503. These faculty and staff are not necessarily registered with the DRC.
- There is an affinity group for employees with disabilities that could provide information.
- Dr. David Rothenberger in the Medical School is doing work on physician burn-out.
- Daniel Greenberg, a former University graduate student, has also done work on this.

Members discussed several aspects of the conversation that the committee could look at during the next academic year, including faculty and staff health and wellbeing and how it relates to insurance coverage; how issues related to disability are dealt with in searches; and the experience of graduate assistants.

2. Alexander Report/Demilitarization

Next, the committee discussed the [Alexander Report](#) and the topic of demilitarizing the University of Minnesota Police Department (UMPD). Munson described the discussion of a [resolution on demilitarization](#) at the [University Senate meeting on March 25, 2021](#), noting that the authors had consulted with a number of committees, but not Disabilities Issues. Ryan Machtmes said that roughly half of individuals killed by police have disabilities, but the disability community is often left out of the conversation.

Jennifer McComas mentioned the [recent change of the Diversity and Social Justice Liberal Education theme to Race, Power, and Justice in the United States](#). She commented that overall she felt it was a positive change, but that it seemed to exclude discussion of disabilities. Munson said that critical race studies is a good way of looking at marginalization as a whole, but agreed that to external audiences, talking about race and power may seem to exclude other marginalized identities. Gayle Golden, a member of the Council of Liberal Education (CLE), clarified that under the new requirement, the course content only needed to include race as a component; other marginalized identities could still be the main focus of the course. In other words, the content should be intersectional, including race. McComas and others thanked Golden for this clarification.

Regarding the Alexander Report, Amber Bathke, senate associate, University Senate Office, explained that the president was forming a group, the [M Safe Implementation Team](#), to look at the recommendations in that report and make recommendations to the president on what to implement and what to prioritize. Machtmes asked whether there was a disability advocate on the committee, and Bathke responded that as far as she knew, the committee had not yet been seated; only the chairs had been named.

Members made the following additional comments about the Alexander Report:

- The report includes references to historical trauma; trauma-informed responses should be part of the conversation.
- One recommendation was to test an app that allows the voluntary sharing of personal information by students with special needs, disabilities, mental health conditions, or other situations that would be improved by the police responding to calls that involve them with the correct information about their conditions or situations. This raises some concerns, including privacy and security concerns, and the fact that this puts the onus on marginalized populations to share information, rather than on the police department to provide training on how to interact with people with various disabilities.
- De-escalation training should be emphasized as a critical tool for police to address mental health concerns.

The committee decided to write a letter to the chairs of the M Safe Implementation Team with their recommendations. Munson asked Bathke to distribute a Google Doc so that members could work together offline to draft such a letter.

Munson thanked members for their dedication and service, and members thanked him for his leadership as chair for the past three years. Munson welcomed David Johnson as the incoming chair. He then adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office