

Disabilities Issues Committee
October 28, 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:** Committee Updates; College Student Health—COVID Impact Study; SERU COVID Survey]

PRESENT: Ben Munson (chair), Jeff Baier, Jonathan Curoe, Kim Doberstein, Erin Durban, Mary DeGrote Goering, Gayle Golden, William Goodnow, Sanoa Hagen, Kiel Harell, David Johnson, Donna Johnson, Ryan Machtmes, Jennifer McComas, Gail Myers, Lars Oddsson, Dadee Saye, Deena Wassenberg

REGRETS: Matthew Hoekstra, Samantha Grover, Emily Norenberg

GUESTS: Daniel Jones-White, assistant director, Office of Institutional Research; Katherine Lust, director of research, Boynton Health; Krista Soria, director, Student Affairs Assessment, Office of Student Affairs

1. Committee Updates

Professor Benjamin Munson, chair, called the meeting to order. Members gave the following updates:

- Munson reported that he and Donna Johnson had met with Erin Slattengren, assistant to the provost, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, regarding the task force on supporting students with disabilities. He said that the task force would be empaneled shortly, and that he expected it to have its first meeting by the next meeting of the Disabilities Issues Committee.
- Ryan Machtmes reported back from a meeting with Dr. Cedric Alexander, the consultant hired to assess campus safety and policing on the Twin Cities campus with regard to racial justice and equity issues. Machtmes reported that the meeting was mostly introductory, and therefore the decision had been made to schedule a second meeting, which would take place on November 2, 2020. Munson said that he would be attending that meeting, and planned to bring up how the University of Minnesota Police Department (UMPD) understands racialized ideas of disability—the fact that some behavior might be understood as related to disabilities in a white person, but perceived as criminal behavior in a person of color. He asked members for feedback on other points to raise, and members suggested the following:
 - 50% of accidental police shootings involve people with disabilities; the intersection of race and other factors compounds that already startling figure.
 - What kind of training around mental health issues do UMPD officers receive, and what kind of de-escalation training?
 - If defunding is off the table, is disarmament an option?

- Negative police interactions not only arise because of mental health issues and other disabilities, but such negative interactions can also *cause* mental health issues and sometimes bodily injury.

2. College Student Health—COVID Impact Study

Next, Munson introduced Dr. Katie Lust, director of research, Boynton Health, who was in attendance to present the results of a research project, [College Student Health—COVID Impact Study](#). Lust noted that the survey was open from April 21 through May 5, 2020, and was sent to a random sample of undergraduate and graduate students on the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses. Highlights of the presentation included:

- The data indicated a higher incidence of mental health concerns across the entire population of respondents since the pandemic began, when compared to results from previous College Student Health Survey data.
- Students with disabilities; students who identified as non-binary, genderqueer, or transgender; and students of color who responded to the survey indicated much higher rates of mental health diagnoses or symptoms than students who did not identify with these categories, both during and before the pandemic. The intersection of two (or more) of these identities increased the likelihood that the student reported experiencing mental health issues.
- Since the incidence of mental health concerns among students who identified as non-binary was so high, members asked if gender dysphoria was classified as a mental health issue for purposes of this study; Lust said that it was not.
- Students with disabilities reported much higher frequency of COVID-19 related mental health stressors than those who did not report having a disability.

Detailed data is available in the [PowerPoint](#). Munson thanked Lust for her time and for conducting this important research.

3. SERU COVID Survey

Next, Munson welcomed Krista Soria, director, Student Affairs Assessment, Office of Student Affairs and Daniel Jones-White, assistant director, Office of Institutional Research, who were present to share the [results of the SERU COVID Survey](#). Jones-White explained the design of the survey to the committee, noting that ten U.S. large, public, research-intensive institutions and 15 international institutions administered the survey from May to July 2020. A total of 34,025 undergraduate students at nine institutions responded to the survey, and a total of 17,527 graduate students at ten institutions responded. Response rates varied across institutions from 13%-41%. At the University of Minnesota, the survey was sent only to graduate students, with a response rate of 41%.

Soria then walked the committee through the results of the survey. Highlights included the following:

- Students identifying with a disability were negatively impacted more acutely by the pandemic than students not identifying with a disability.
- Obstacles to online learning and degree progress varied amongst the various disability categories. Such obstacles included but were not limited to difficulty with remote learning for a variety of reasons, including lack of motivation, lack of access to

technology, unexpected expenses related to online learning, lack of a suitable place to learn/study, and increased family responsibilities.

- More detailed data is available in the PowerPoint, as well as via Tableau (must have a University of Minnesota email ID to access). Themes that arose in the qualitative data on how disability affected students' experiences after their institution moved to online learning included isolation, anxiety, depression, distraction, and lack of faculty support or understanding.

Finding these data highly concerning, members brainstormed about what the committee could do to help alleviate some of the stress that students are facing as a result of the pandemic. Ideas included advocating for continuation of the S/N grading options that were offered during spring 2020; and advocating for faculty to be mindful of the additional stress and challenges related to remote learning; advocating for faculty to provide alternate ways for students to fulfill requirements or assignments. The committee decided to write a letter to the provost, asking that an email be sent to all instructors systemwide about these concerns, including data and suggestions on how to help alleviate some of these challenges.

Munson thanked Soria and Jones-White for their presentation and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office