

Social Concerns Committee
September 21, 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; Committee Orientation; Student Voter Turnout Initiatives; Committee Priorities]

PRESENT: Aseem Kaul (chair), Ryan Allen, Leif Anderson, Katherine Arnold, Emily Eaton, Linda Frizzell, Becca Gercken, Hyunjoo Im, Mary Kurth, Katsumi Matsuomo, Jason Meyer, Rachel Miller, Miguel Ovies-Bocanegra, Molly Schwartz, Sarah Sexton, Kiran Sjoberg, Nicole Smiley, Jim Stemper, Meaghan Thul, Boris Volkov, Sonja Zbinden

ABSENT: Leah Peterson, Roselin Victor

GUESTS: Megan Sweet, assistant to the president, Office of the President; Rose Lloyd-Slifkin, deputy director, Government and Legislative Affairs, Minnesota Student Association

1. Welcome and Introductions

Professor Aseem Kaul, chair, called the meeting to order and called for a round of introductions.

2. Committee Orientation

Next, Amber Bathke, senate associate, University Senate Office, provided an [orientation](#) to University Senate governance.

3. Student Voter Turnout Initiatives

Kaul then welcomed Rose Lloyd-Slifkin, deputy director, Government and Legislative Affairs, Minnesota Student Association (MSA), who was present to give an update on MSA's initiatives on student voter turnout.

Lloyd-Slifkin told the committee about the [Row the Vote initiative](#), which launched in August 2020 and includes recruiting and training student ambassadors from all over the Twin Cities. The goal was to recruit 75 students to be Row the Vote Ambassadors to help inform and encourage other students to vote. So far, Lloyd-Slifkin noted, 53 students had signed up. This initiative was started by MSA, which is Twin Cities based, but they are in conversation with student leaders on other campuses and hope other campuses will adopt the model in the future. Becca Gercken stated that Morris is a leader in student civic engagement, and offered to put Lloyd-Slifkin in touch with student leaders from that campus.

Lloyd-Slifkin added that the benchmarking report that Social Concerns put together during the previous year had been extremely helpful.

Members then discussed writing a statement encouraging faculty to offer flexibility to students in order to facilitate participation in the election, and to distribute information about voting to students. Members felt that to maximize effectiveness, the statement should be completed between now and the next meeting. Kaul offered to draft a statement and send it out for feedback and an electronic vote, so that it could be sent out to faculty mid-October.

4. Committee Priorities

Finally, Kaul asked members for their suggestions on committee priorities for the year. He reminded everyone that the priorities identified last year were voter turnout, environmental issues, and mental health. He also mentioned that at a meeting of the University Senate committee chairs, several chairs had indicated that their committees would be working on the issues of mental health, pandemic-related issues, and racial equity.

Members felt that aside from the statement on support for student voting, work the voter turnout initiative was complete. They indicated interest in hearing an update on the mental health initiatives out of the Office of the President, etc. The following topics were suggested as additional priorities:

- Indigenous issues
- Racial equity
- Environmental issues
- Safety on campus (related to copious recent SAFE-U alerts)
- Student access to wifi/broadband during pandemic

Kaul proposed that after the meeting, a survey be sent out to members asking them to indicate their top three priorities for the committee. Once the top three priorities were determined, Kaul proposed a separate sign-up for subcommittee membership.

Hearing no further discussion, Kaul adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office