

DISABILITIES ISSUES COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
NOVEMBER 18, 2009

In these minutes: Disabled Students Cultural Center Update, Disability Services Update,

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

PRESENT: Julia Robinson, chair pro tem, Alex Lubet, Mary Muwahid, Joanie Tool, Donna Johnson, Dale Branton, Joanna O'Connell, Susan Rose, Carla Tabourne, Michelle Jones, Amber Mayer

REGRETS: Carol Rachac, Kimberly Simon, Peggy Mann Rinehart, Tammy Berberi, Frank Symons, Miriam Krause, Victoria Nelson

ABSENT: Brittany Parkman

OTHERS ATTENDING: Dave Fuecker

I). Professor Julia Robinson, chair pro tem, convened the meeting, welcomed those present and called for introductions.

II). Donna Johnson, director, Disability Services, reported hearing that the Disabled Students Cultural Center (DSCC) was trying to get Josh Blue, a comedian with a disability, to perform at Spring Jam. The Student Unions & Activities office plans to sponsor this event with support from the DSCC.

III). Professor Robinson called on Ms. Johnson to provide a Disability Services (DS) update. Ms. Johnson shared information on the growth of DS. She illustrated this growth by comparing figures from the 2007 – 2008 academic year with the 2008 – 2009 academic year:

	<u>2007 – 2008</u>	<u>2008 – 2009</u>
Students served:	1, 579	1,813
Employees served:	695	920
Interpreting hours:	12,752	13,216
Captioning hours:	1,706	2,288
Tests administered:	2,489	3,264

The highest group served by DS are people with psychiatric disabilities, which is followed by people with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, and learning disabilities, respectively.

Moving on, Ms. Johnson noted that discussions continue about the inaccessibility of Scott Hall. Despite years of discussion, it appears that there are plans to finally make it accessible albeit they have not yet been confirmed. Roberta Juarez has been assigned to this project.

DS will meet with a consultant January 3 – 6, 2010 regarding their ever-increasing complex document conversion needs. There are an increasing number of students who are taking math, statistics, etc., and these materials are not easily convertible.

Ms. Johnson noted that DS recently hired an outreach coordinator, Susan Aase. Ms. Aase will work with both UReturn and Student Services to conduct not only training sessions, but also to make systemic change within departments.

Roberta Juarez' position, noted Ms. Johnson, is being modified. Previously, her position was 75% student services and 25% physical access, but with the additional building needs on campus, her position will be 75% physical access and 25% student services. Ms. Juarez was instrumental in making the TCF Bank Stadium accessible.

DS has been working with a consultant from InTouch Graphics, Joe Cioffi, who has developed tactile maps of the campus. In addition, he is working on narrative maps of the campus, which are designed for low-vision/blind people.

Yesterday, noted Ms. Johnson, a second advisory committee meeting was held for the Marcus Foundation Grant. DS and the Medical School have been awarded a \$75,000 "Taking It to the Next Level: Advancing Awareness and Equity of Medical Trainees with Invisible Disabilities" grant from the Marcus Foundation. The project's goal is to promote welcoming and inclusive learning environments for all medical trainees, including those with invisible disabilities (e.g., psychiatric, learning, systemic).

Ms. Johnson went on to note that she met with Provost Tom Sullivan and Vice Provost Bob McMaster earlier this week to discuss the possibility of a provost's committee on universal design for learning. While they were both interested in the idea, Ms. Johnson stated that no firm commitment was made. She will keep the committee informed about any developments in this area.

Professor Robinson asked about the DS budget given its tremendous growth. Ms. Johnson noted that DS is working hard to do what it is doing within budget.

IV). Professor Robinson welcomed Dave Fuecker, associate director, DS who is responsible for the UReturn program. Mr. Fuecker stated that previously UReturn was

named Employee Services. He then distributed brochures and highlighted the structure of UReturn and how it fits into DS.

UReturn, noted Mr. Fuecker, was created in 1993. Prior to the formal creation of this program, functions handled by UReturn were haphazardly handled out of the Office of Human Resources. In fall 2005, UReturn became an integrated service provider, which means it began serving all employees irrespective of the ideology of their injury, e.g., occupational versus non-occupational. Prior to this, there was no internal case management for occupational injury and illness, which is also known as Worker's Compensation. Integration was important for several reasons, which include but are not limited to:

- The University's aging workforce, which exceeds the aging workforce nationally.
- Disparaging treatment of illnesses, which varied depending how a person became injured or where they acquired an illness.
- The need to create a one-stop shop for people who have a disability that interfaces with their job.

Cornerstones of UReturn include:

- Confidentiality – information released is not diagnostic or treatment related, but only function-related information, e.g., what a person can do on the job.
- Neutrality - UReturn is a neutral entity.
- Early intervention – Members' attention was turned to a brochure emphasizing the importance of early intervention.

Mr. Fuecker stated that the UReturn program receives real-time notification of long-term and short-term disability claims. This allows UReturn to send employees who have filed a claim an introductory letter along with brochures early on. Cases are then triaged and followed up on. For the most part, a similar approach is used for people who have filed Worker's Compensation claims.

Approximately one year ago, an early intervention strategy was implemented, which created a partnership with the University's long and short-term disability insurance carrier, The Standard. The Standard pays to have a contract employee embedded in the UReturn office. This allows the University to provide employees with additional support in getting needed documentation to The Standard.

The UReturn program is also able to set up preventative claims, noted Mr. Fuecker. At the onset or exacerbation of a condition that could lead to a leave of absence, UReturn is able to implement mitigating measures to avoid or reduce the likelihood of a leave of absence. The Standard pays for these mitigating measures, which it attributes to any subsequent claims. This allows the University to measure the impact of the mitigating measures it put in place against a claim. Additionally, on an aggregate basis, this data can be compared with data from the Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI), which allows the University to compare itself to similar institutions and measure its return on investment. In addition, if an individual is unable to return to their job/career of origin, the University

now can seamlessly transfer these cases to career development/job placement resources outside the University.

UReturn, noted Mr. Fuecker, operates similar to Student Services in that at the most basic level, the UReturn program houses confidential medical information. From here, UReturn protects the interactive process as defined by the law. Having said this, Mr. Fuecker stated that about 60% - 70% of the people UReturn serves are not covered by disability law; therefore, UReturn supports what is reasonable in an employee's job. A long time ago, UReturn moved beyond the law in terms of who has rights, to preserving employment and productivity. This is simply good business for the University, and it benefits employees.

A member voiced sincere appreciation for all the work that went into integrating the UReturn program to make it what it is today. With that said, what would be helpful at the college level to make the UReturn program more visible. Unfortunately, there are a number of people who should know about the program that do not. Mr. Fuecker suggested inviting UReturn representatives to unit staff meetings to provide employees with information on what UReturn does (institutional proactive outreach). A UReturn goal, stated Mr. Fuecker, is to be able to offer targeted outreach/training. Ms. Johnson added that DS realizes that outreach does not necessarily just mean face-to-face contact but web-based tools need to be made available to employees as well. Mr. Fuecker concurred, and stated that UReturn needs to be prominent on college websites for employees who look there for these types of resources. The goal is to surround employees with information on the resources that are available to them. In addition, with respect to Worker's Compensation, UReturn is working on an automated First Report of Injury.

Regarding outreach, Professor Lubet suggested contacting Twin Cities Public Television (TPT), which may be very interested in spotlighting the work of DS and UReturn. In addition, he recommended DS use the data they have collected and turn it into publishable scholarship. Research with pragmatic-teeth is what people like to see coming out of the University. Mr. Fuecker stated that with respect to TPT, he and Phil Kragnes has been on Tech Talk to provide information on adaptive technology. He added that he would welcome the opportunity to be on TPT to talk about the UReturn's internal case management and its business applications. As stated previously, overall it is good business to retain employees. In terms of the academic component of this suggestion, Mr. Fuecker stated that he teaches a 3-hour lecture each semester for the Carlson School of Management (CSOM). He agreed that there is room to create robust curriculum around internal case management, etc.

Are there sick or injured people who choose not to make use of UReturn, asked a member? For example, some people may not want to necessarily identify themselves as disabled. Targeted outreach may be important for employees who identify this as an issue. Mr. Fuecker stated that UReturn participation is not required. With this said, there are people who choose not to use UReturn for a variety of reasons. For example, the term 'disability' is a labeling term. While most people in the disabled culture do not see

the term 'disability' as either positive or negative, society-wide the term has negative connotations. In general, very few people choose not to use UReturn; anecdotally, this number is probably about 10%.

In an effort to improve the program and for outreach purposes, a member suggested the UReturn office actively reassure employees who are in a state. Mr. Fuecker agreed that UReturn needs to do a better job of building connections with employees who are in a vulnerable position. Ms. Johnson added that DS has talked about the need for marketing that tells people's stories.

One of the barriers that the UReturn office runs into with employers across the University has to do with financial concerns. Rather than taking a big picture approach with respect to benefits, Worker's Compensation, and long and short-term disability, many administrators or department heads only take their immediate budget into consideration, and are can be reticent to the idea of making accommodations for their employees. The University is self-insured for Worker's Compensation, and long and short-term disability for at least three months. For a department to say that they would prefer a person collect disability as opposed to only being able to do part of his/her job is backwards in terms of good business. Statistically, the longer someone is away from their job, the less likely they will return. There are a wide variety of departments on campus, some that make great decisions, and others that make suspect decisions. In response, a member stated that this then begs the need for a systems approach to this problem. Often, unit administrators who are faculty have little to no preparation for dealing with these types of situations. There is a learning curve for dealing with these issues, and just when many faculty members are getting up to speed it is time for them to step down. Training needs to be frontloaded for faculty who take on administrative roles. The responsibility for dealing with these issues is at a higher level than the UReturn office. To what extent can this committee serve to help improve the current situation, asked a member?

A member suggested developing something as simple as a checklist to help administrators. Mr. Fuecker stated that this is a good idea, which UReturn will explore.

Mr. Fuecker went on to talk about the voluntary nature of the UReturn office, and stated that, in his opinion, the services they provide should not be made mandatory. People need to have the right to choose. Having said this, UReturn faces the challenge of how to reassure people that they are making the right choice by participating in the program.

A member suggested partnering with the University's Wellness Program in terms of providing educational awareness about UReturn and its services. The educational awareness raising should happen through the rubric of wellness and health rather than through disability. Mr. Fuecker agreed that when it comes to UReturn services, an emphasis should be placed on wellness. This is a wellness and work-life balance issue.

After listening to today's conversation, a member stated that a role of Disabilities Issues is to evaluate the effectiveness of DS services. Is there a formal process in place? If not, should a process be created for collecting feedback from members of the University

community who have used or have thought about using DS? Having such a tool would serve to identify areas where DS could improve and/or enhance its services. Ms. Johnson stated that DS does not have an overall evaluation plan, but DS is aware of the need for such a tool. Mr. Fuecker also concurred and stated that there needs to be some sort of oversight mechanism so that lapses in services can be identified and addressed.

In light of time, Professor Robinson thanked Mr. Fuecker for his report and excellent presentation.

V). Professor Lubet announced that the next interdisciplinary graduate program in disability studies meeting will be held on December 18, 2009 in 280 Ferguson Hall from 9:00 – 4:30. He encouraged anyone who is available to attend to do so. A major focus of this meeting will be to create a disabilities studies curriculum. Professor Lubet will send out another announcement asking people to R.S.V.P.

VI). Hearing no further business, Professor Robinson adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate