
The University Senate

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Joint Meeting of the Health Sciences Student Consultative Committee (HS SCC) and the Faculty Advisory Committee on the Health Sciences (FACHS) December 6, 2023 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; Student and Faculty Mental Health in the Health Sciences; Governor's Task Force on Academic Health at the University of Minnesota and the Board of Regents Special Committee on Academic Health]

PRESENT: Annie Lindgren (HS SCC co-chair), Robert Jones (FACHS co-chair), Pawel Mroz (FACHS co-chair), Jonathan Barnes, Eliana Branch, Laura Dammer, Makayla Maher, Margaret M. Mattson, Scott Robison, Lauren Ross, Brian Sick, Cliff Steer, Tim Stratton, Jeffrey Todd, Melanie R. Watson

REGRETS: Molly Doyle

OTHERS: Erin Heath, director, University Senate Office (staff to the committee)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Annie Lindgren, co-chair of the HS SCC, called the joint meeting of the Health Sciences Student Consultative Committee (HS SCC) and the Faculty Advisory Committee for the Health Sciences (FACHS) to order. She noted that Molly Doyle, the other co-chair of the HS SCC, was unable to attend. The rest of the people present introduced themselves.

2. Student and Faculty Mental Health in the Health Sciences

Following up on joint meeting from last year, members discussed updates regarding student and faculty mental health in the health sciences:

- College of Pharmacy's approach to in-person and remote learning: While offering Zoom options and flexible classroom settings can increase accessibility, it may reduce the sense of community that comes from daily campus interaction. For first-year pharmacy students under a new curriculum, in-person attendance is generally required unless they have an excused absence or prior accommodation, which helps foster community and align with pre-COVID practices.
- Student Services provides wellness days with activities like puzzles and hand massages, contributing to a positive atmosphere.

- Scott Robinson said that this year, the emphasis is on in-person participation. He mentioned efforts to minimize stress, such as creating an internal assignment calendar to avoid conflicts, and expressed interest in the impact of pass/fail grading on stress levels.
- Makayla Maher shared that while pass/fail grading helps with some stress, competition remains due to percentile grades and class rankings.
- Laura Dammer mentioned that the “Be Well” initiative is analyzing data from the Spring 2023 survey, focusing on community and belonging.
- Jones shared that his teaching approach has evolved over the last couple of years, influenced by the pandemic. He’s aimed to be more accessible and sensitive to students’ mental health. He hopes for more training on mental health issues in the future. He also noted an increase in requests for personal extensions.
- Jeffrey Todd, with 20 years of experience, discussed how COVID-19 has changed attitudes towards health and attendance. He believes it's now more acceptable for both students and faculty to take sick days, which has ultimately benefited everyone.
- Tim Stratton explained the Pharmacy Program’s system for handling student accommodation requests. The Office of Student Services assesses these requests and informs faculty if an accommodation is granted.
- Jones mentioned challenges with managing student absences during clinical rotations, stressing the need for a better same-day absence process. While students are generally eager to gain clinical experience, coordinating absences remains a challenge.
- Lindgren noted the ongoing promotion of affinity groups within the College of Pharmacy. She highlighted the inclusion of the Medical Laboratory Sciences and Occupational Therapy programs in these efforts, seeing it as a positive development.

3. Governor’s Task Force on Academic Health at the University of Minnesota and the Board of Regents Special Committee on Academic Health

Lindgren asked for an update on the Governor’s Task Force on Academic Health at the University of Minnesota. Brian Sick shared the following updates:

- Health program deans have presented their programs, but non-health science programs (like dietetics and social work) haven't been included in discussions.
- The task force emphasizes interprofessional team-based care, particularly in rural settings due to workforce imbalances. These discussions include non-physician roles. Factors influencing rural practice include growing up in a rural area, loan forgiveness, and rural education experiences.
- Lindgren suggested highlighting pharmacists’ roles in collaborative practice agreements, where they can adjust medication orders and manage patient care effectively.
- Robison inquired about discussions on telehealth training and access, highlighting its importance in rural areas, especially during winter when transportation is challenging. Sick said that telehealth was discussed in the governor’s task force meeting as a key modality for health equity and access.
- There are concerns about inadequate funding for health science programs and the potential impact of Fairview’s buyout by Sanford on Medical School funding. The broader issue of University funding was discussed, noting that the state’s funding for the University has remained unchanged for 15 years, without adjustments for inflation or increased costs.

- Public health was emphasized as crucial, with a focus on primary and secondary prevention as part of the task force's recommendations. There is a push for creating a new bachelor's degree in public health to quickly build the public health workforce.
- Students expressed concerns about how student perspectives are being integrated into the task force's discussions. Sick acknowledged that direct student input is lacking but mentioned opportunities for public comments at meetings and the involvement of deans on the task force.
- Lindgren inquired about the role of the Board of Regents (BOR) in the special meeting, specifically whether they are providing feedback or presentations related to the task force's discussions. Sick said that the BOR often receives updates from the task force. Pawel Mroz added that the governor's task force will conclude in January, while the Regents' Special Committee on Health Sciences will last nearly two years. The Regents' Committee aims to educate members on complex healthcare issues and will oversee decisions related to the University's joint ventures and healthcare affiliations.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office