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# The University Senate

FACULTY · STUDENT · P&A · CIVIL SERVICE

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## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### Social Concerns Committee

November 18, 2024

### 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. The University Senate Office utilized notes taken during the meeting, video recording and transcript of the meeting, and AI to assist in summarizing substantive parts of the meeting transcript to compose these minutes. Minutes are reviewed by the committee before posting.*

[In these minutes: Welcome; Guest Speaker: Campus Protests; 24-25 Priorities]

**PRESENT:** Aseem Kaul (chair), Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, Iris W Borowsky, Mark Collier, Aubree Derksen, Liliana Devereux, Sunasir Dutta, VV Ganeshanathan, Janeth Guerra de Patino, Jason Meyer, Mohamed-Khadar A Qas, Joanne E Richardson. Meaghan M Thul

**REGRETS:** Char Psihos

**GUESTS:** Rachel Croson, executive vice president and provost; Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee members: Yuk Sham (chair), Maimuna Aden, KC Harrison, Mercedes M Ramirez Fernandez, Keisha Varma, Samantha Wells

#### 1. Welcome

Aseem Kaul welcomed the social concerns committee and the Equity, Access, and Diversity (EAD) committee to this combined meeting. Kaul reminded the participants that the EAD committee would be present for the first half an hour of the meeting to engage with Provost Croson.

#### 2. Guest Speaker: Campus Protests

Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Croson attended the meeting to discuss the protests at the University and the related University policies. Croson provided an overview of the institution's approach to protests and demonstrations, including responses to events that occurred last spring. These events involved an encampment that violated policies on time, place, and manner for demonstrations. Unlike other campuses that resorted to police intervention, the University's administration negotiated with students and established a settlement, addressing some student demands while committing to specific actions. Croson highlighted that all commitments had been fulfilled, with some additional demands also met.

Over the summer, the administration reviewed protest policies without implementing changes. They consolidated and clarified existing policies, creating accessible resources, such as handouts

and a website, to guide students on acceptable protest practices. They also modified their approach to handling protests: University Police (UMPD) no longer serves as the first point of contact; this role shifted to Student Affairs to de-escalate potential conflicts. A new four-stage process was introduced, emphasizing education and fair warning before escalating to academic or legal consequences.

Croson noted that most protests this fall adhered to policies. However, an incident involving the occupation of Morrill Hall necessitated intervention due to safety concerns. The protest involved vandalism, including spray-painting cameras and breaking windows, which led to the eventual involvement of UMPD. Croson assured attendees that UMPD, rather than external law enforcement, handled the situation, addressing concerns over police-community trust.

Attendees raised concerns about transparency, especially regarding undocumented meetings referred to as "huddles" with faculty representatives during the protests. Croson defended the practice, stating they provided real-time faculty input but did not constitute formal governance meetings. Questions also arose about freedom of the Press during the Morrill Hall event, as a student journalist faced brief detention. Croson deferred detailed answers to UMPD leadership, citing their expertise.

Questions about the University's engagement with protesters and the steps taken to address their demands, particularly around divestment and anti-discrimination efforts were asked by the committee. Croson reiterated the administration's commitment to honoring its agreements while maintaining existing policies. Mercedes Ramirez Fernandez elaborated on efforts to support marginalized students through identity-based counseling groups and intentional dialogue spaces.

### **3. 24-25 Priorities**

The meeting addressed the University's ongoing challenges regarding protests, academic freedom, and policy transparency. Members discussed the University's response to campus protests, emphasizing the need to balance safety and freedom of expression. There were calls for greater transparency in administrative communications and handling of controversial terminology used in official contexts.

Concerns were raised about academic freedom following the rescission of a faculty hiring offer, which led to votes of no confidence in key University leaders. Members debated whether to focus on systemic policy changes or more immediate issues, such as improving dialogue and addressing protest-related language. Potential actions included organizing a public forum to gather diverse perspectives, engaging with student and community voices, and drafting recommendations for clearer and more inclusive protest policies.

The committee acknowledged its limitations and the importance of collaborating with other university bodies, such as the Campus Safety Committee and external groups. Members emphasized that meaningful change might require multi-year efforts. Kaul, stressed the importance of gathering input from a wide range of voices to inform their decisions, suggesting that hearing from students, faculty, and community representatives would be critical. The committee decided they would like to explore Engagement with UMPD, Consideration Public Forums, and Focus on Protest Language used in policies and by the administration.

#### **4. Adjournment**

With nothing additional to discuss, Kaul adjourned the meeting.

Deena Barker  
University Senate Office