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# The University Senate

FACULTY · STUDENT · P&A · CIVIL SERVICE

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## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### Student Senate Consultative Committee (SSCC)

April 12, 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.*

[**In these minutes:** Policy Consultation: Board of Regents Policies: *Tuition and Fees* and *Student Services Fees*; Consultation on Changes to Student Senate Eligibility; Resolution to Clarify and Reform Campus Voting Rules]

**PRESENT:** Pavan Guttipatti (chair), Taiwo Aremu (vice chair), Natalie Bennett, Jovany Betancourt, Matthew Croft, Niel Drabek, Ethan Ion, Kaitlyn Roers, Pete Smith

**REGRETS:** Mia McGraw, Paisley Sierra

**ABSENT:** None.

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** Emily Larson, budget analyst, University Budget and Finance; David Israels-Swenson, senior director of student engagement and wellness; Dr. Katie Jackson, associate vice president and dean of students, Office of Student Affairs; Carrie Ryan Gallia, senior associate general counsel, Office of the General Counsel; Nancy Sims, parliamentarian, University Senate; Jacob Richter, student senator, Student Senate

#### 1. **Policy Consultation: *Tuition and Fees* and *Student Services Fees***

Chair Pavan Guttipatti called the meeting to order and welcomed Emily Larson, budget analyst, University Budget and Finance; and David Israels-Swenson, senior director of student engagement and wellness, who were present to consult on Board of Regents Policies: *Tuition and Fees* and *Student Services Fees*. Larson and Israels-Swenson detailed the rationale, changes, and consultation processes.

#### **Policy Streamlining:**

- The two policies are being combined for clarity and simplicity.
- Administrative aspects of student service fees are shifted to a separate administrative policy.

#### **Tuition and Fees Policy Updates:**

- No substantive changes, but terminology has been updated.

- Removed outdated sections, including the elimination of distance delivery fees (since FY22).
- Clarified guidance on tuition rates for non-degree-seeking students and graduate/professional programs.

### **Student Service Fees Updates:**

- Purpose: Fund essential student services such as health services, recreation, student unions, and clubs.
- Revised criteria: Fees now apply to students enrolled in six or more credits (fall/spring) or three or more credits (summer), eliminating exclusions for off-campus instruction.
- Rationale: Reflects changes in course delivery (post-COVID) and ensures fair access to services regardless of course format.

### **Administrative Policy Development:**

- Created an intermediate policy layer to outline consistent campus guidelines.
- Emphasizes viewpoint neutrality, transparent decision-making, and prohibitions on partisan political spending of fees.
- Existing campus-specific guidelines (e.g., handbooks) will now function as procedural documents under the administrative policy.

### **Student Feedback and Consultation:**

- Policy revisions were influenced by student input, particularly from the School of Public Health, highlighting gaps in service access for distance learners.
- Broad consultations are underway with various University committees to gather additional input.

Larson and Israels-Swenson then responded as follows to questions and comments from the committee:

Jovany Betancourt expressed a desire for the Student Senate to have a greater role in decisions regarding student fees, similar to other institutions where student governance bodies actively manage these funds. He suggested including changes in the policy to integrate the Student Senate's involvement, emphasizing representation from all system campuses. Larson agreed that student governance groups are elected bodies well-suited for such responsibilities. She promised to relay the feedback to relevant groups for consideration.

Matthew Croft expressed skepticism about the policy changes, noting they were primarily administrative reassignments rather than substantive reforms. He criticized the Twin Cities campus for poor implementation of student fee policies compared to other campuses and highlighted issues such as biased fund distribution, lack of transparency, and restricted applications of funds, and questioned the administration's oversight.

Natalie Bennett echoed Betancourt's point, suggesting a majority-student composition (three-fifths or two-thirds) for committees managing student fees, with an administrative officer as an ex-officio member for continuity. She raised concerns about unclear language in policies regarding graduate students, particularly PhD students who may not be on campus while taking

thesis credits. She suggested clarifying how credit thresholds apply to graduate students, especially those working off-campus or beyond candidacy.

Taiwo Aremu sought clarification regarding the student service fee policy, specifically whether it excluded students not in the U.S., as had been discussed at a Board of Regents meeting. Larson responded, noting that this was not part of the current policy, though procedural differences might have existed. Aremu elaborated on how the student service fee was managed, emphasizing that students were involved in the approval process, with funds supporting various University units, including legal services and student misconduct services. He stressed that the process was primarily student-driven, without external guidance. Larson asked for clarification regarding administrative units funded by the student service fee, such as Student Legal Services and the Aurora Center. Aremu confirmed that his colleagues wanted the Student Senate to have insight into these funds for transparency. He further mentioned that although he had previously been involved in the administrative committee, he had not been required to report back to the Student Senate, but there was a push for greater involvement moving forward.

Pete Smith, a medical student and representative from the Professional Student Government (PSG), shared his thoughts on the need for senate representation on a committee, emphasizing that students who have already been elected to leadership positions should be the ones representing their peers at such levels for legitimacy. He also proposed a specific majority requirement (like two-thirds or three-fifths) for student representation on the committee. Smith expressed concerns about the student services fee, particularly regarding graduate students in medical and health sciences programs who may not benefit from all the services they are being charged for, such as gym access or campus-based services when working in remote locations. He called for more flexibility in how these fees are applied. Larson clarified that student services fees cannot be opted out of at any campus. Some programs can request that students be excluded from paying the fee, but this is only possible after consultation with students and approval by the program. Smith responded by stressing the difference between never using services and being **unable** to use them.

Niel Drabek agreed with the concept of student services as a common good but acknowledged that not all students benefit equally from certain services. He supported the idea of student government representatives managing such funds and emphasized that student representatives should be elected to ensure they represent their peers accurately.

Croft provided specific recommendations for the policy and the student services process, suggesting greater transparency, public access, and proper documentation for all committees and allocation processes.

Finally, Natalie Bennett raised concerns about graduate students who may stop paying into the common good but still need services like legal aid or support from the Aurora Center, suggesting that more flexibility should be offered in these cases.

## **2. Consultation on changes to Student Senate Eligibility**

Next, Guttipatti initiated discussion on proposed changes to the Student Senate Bylaws. Betancourt explained the main points of the discussion, focusing on the creation of a student senator code of conduct and a process for senator removal. He highlighted the issue with current vague guidelines for removals and the need for more specific rules.

Nancy Sims, senate parliamentarian, asked for clarification on why the current rules were insufficient, specifically questioning what was lacking in the existing rules related to senator dismissal powers. Betancourt elaborated on the challenges posed by the vague language in the current rules regarding the removal of student senators. The rules are based on violations of the Student Code of Conduct or bringing doubt upon the senate, but this language is too ambiguous, making it difficult to justify removals. He suggested creating a more specific and clear code of conduct for senators, with explicit behaviors like blackmail or abuse of power listed as violations. This would make it easier to enforce rules and remove senators for clear breaches of conduct.

Croft built on this idea by outlining three main considerations for creating an effective policy:

- **Clear Expectations:** A code of conduct should be as clear as possible, though it's acknowledged that crafting one that covers all potential issues is difficult.
- **Authority for Removal:** There is a concern about who should have the power to dismiss or sanction senators. Giving this power to the entire senate could disrupt senate business, while granting it to a small group might risk abuse of power.
- **Durable Prohibitions Without Permanence:** The policy should allow for sanctions but not impose permanent bans. For example, if a senator is removed through a two-thirds vote, the senator would be removed unless action is taken to reinstate them, preventing indefinite bans without a way to reverse the decision.

Natalie Bennett emphasized the importance of establishing clear expectations for senators, which would not only set boundaries but also outline positive behaviors, such as giving constructive feedback and addressing others with respect. The goal is to make these norms explicit to avoid unwritten rules and to encourage a respectful environment.

Betancourt highlighted the research done by Bennett on similar documents from other institutions and the importance of aligning with University policies, avoiding conflicts with the Board of Regents. Concerns were raised about creating a “removal clause” and how it might be interpreted or misused. To address this, they discussed involving the parliamentarian to clarify and solidify the language.

Smith noted concerns about how potential violations of the code could affect students’ integrity and credibility, with some expressing hesitation about legal implications. Croft suggested involving a campus committee to handle these issues, while others raised the challenge of having the necessary training to effectively address violations.

Carrie Ryan Gallia, senior associate general counsel, Office of the General Counsel, cautioned against duplicating existing codes of conduct at the University, such as the Board of Regents’ Student Code of Conduct, and raised concerns about the logistical challenges of investigating violations, which require due process. She also warned about possible conflicts with constitutional rights, especially First Amendment rights.

Sims provided additional insights, suggesting that permanent dismissal could undermine democratic representation, as re-elected senators may have the support of their constituency. She recommended considering alternative methods for managing senate work and emphasized the importance of due process in any new code of conduct. Sims also pointed out that the existing

rules already allow for the dismissal of senators through a two-thirds vote if they violate University codes, suggesting that any new rules should avoid complicating this process.

Betancourt acknowledged and agreed with the points made earlier, especially the idea that constituents should have the right to choose their elected officials. He emphasized that even though the contested seat situation was an exception, the principle remains: voters should be able to vote for the candidates they prefer. He then raised a question about whether the issue should be framed as an election and ballot issue, focusing on getting more students to run for positions, or if it should remain an internal Student Senate rule issue.

Croft felt strongly that the rules need clarification. He also commented on the limitations of adopting University rules for the Student Senate, especially from a parliamentary perspective. He suggested eliminating the specific allotment of seats by colleges, which could solve issues like uncontested elections, where a candidate might win a seat with just one vote. This idea, however, would require more work to get students interested in the senate, a challenge that could not be solved solely through enthusiasm. Croft acknowledged that even revising how seats are allocated can become contentious, as seen in the past when the distribution of seats between colleges was debated.

Bennett added her perspective on seat allocation, specifically referencing how some institutions, like Rochester, have fewer seats, which may not be equitable compared to larger campuses. She mentioned that this issue has persisted since the 1960s and requires further attention, though it may fall outside the scope of the current meeting. She also shares her thoughts on the length of the code of conduct and whether it might be beneficial to create a more student-oriented, concise version of the existing document. Bennett suggested that the Student Senate could adopt its own version of the code of conduct, which would be more practical for the student body.

The group also discussed the possibility of making violations of the student conduct code more transparent. John Lof questioned the public availability of information about violations. Ryan Gallia suggested that candidates for senate could sign a release form allowing their disciplinary records to be viewed as part of the election process. However, she acknowledged the complexity of University policies like FERPA, which protects such records unless a legitimate educational interest is involved.

Bennett suggested that the University's code of conduct and other relevant documents could be made more visible and easier to access, emphasizing that awareness of these documents is crucial for effective student governance. She proposed that making these documents more prominent and easier to find would help students understand the rules better.

### **3. Resolution to Clarify and Reform Campus Voting Rules**

Student Senator Jacob Richter presented a [Resolution to Clarify and Reform Campus Voting Rules](#), prompted by issues during the recent election cycle. Some candidates had been disqualified for not submitting financial disclosures, even though they had not spent any money on their campaigns. Richter proposed three key changes:

- A candidate must have received at least 50 votes to be certified, ensuring that elected officials genuinely represented their constituencies.
- Candidates should have only been required to submit financial disclosures if they actively campaigned or spent resources on their candidacies.

- Candidates found in violation of election rules should have been notified and given at least 24 hours to correct the issue before certification, unless the violation was severe.

Richter expressed frustration with how his seat was filled by someone with far fewer votes and dissatisfaction with the Campus Elections team's lack of responsiveness to complaints.

Croft supported Richter's resolution, emphasizing that the rules should have applied equally to all candidates, including write-ins. Croft suggested that the senate might have refused to certify the election results if the process hadn't been handled properly.

Aremu reflected on past experiences with election certification and acknowledged the challenges of addressing issues once results had been announced. He suggested reconvening before the next senate meeting to discuss potential solutions and rectify any mistakes made during the election process. Richter expressed willingness to collaborate on addressing the situation if possible.

Bennett acknowledged the challenges in the election process, expressing sympathy for the difficulties faced by candidates. She raised questions about transparency, particularly regarding the submission of financial disclosures, even when candidates hadn't spent money on their campaigns. Bennett mentioned the potential disadvantage of write-in candidates, who might face additional challenges due to time constraints or less competitive races. She questioned the feasibility of imposing a 50-vote threshold for candidates, considering it might not be practical in all cases, especially for less competitive or smaller constituencies.

Betancourt shared his frustration with the election process, citing his own experience where a technical issue led to him losing his re-election. He criticized the system, noting that despite his efforts to encourage students to vote, the busy schedules of medical students made it difficult to gain enough support. Betancourt also disagreed with the 50-vote threshold, arguing that it would be unrealistic for many colleges, especially smaller ones. He suggested that more attention should be paid to inconsistencies in the election process, such as tracking the internet IDs for voters to ensure fairness. He advocated for a system where the majority of votes counted, even if they were from a smaller pool, rather than imposing a rigid minimum vote requirement.

Smith expressed concerns about the importance of addressing systemic issues within the student elections process, stressing that it is critical to get these issues in front of the Student Senate before the summer break. He suggested extending the election timeline until 3 PM and emphasized long-standing perceived problems with the election team, particularly dismissive attitudes towards addressing issues. Smith also highlighted concerns over voter participation, mentioning that students in certain professional programs (e.g., Duluth campus, Pharmacy, and Medical Schools) did not receive ballots or applications. He argued for holding the election team accountable and suggested that elections should not be run by teams that fail to address these problems.

He also disagreed with the 50-vote requirement, arguing that this would disproportionately affect certain colleges and could lead to vacant seats. He supported requiring candidates to submit financial disclosure forms, as the current process was insufficient. Smith was not in favor of the second part of the resolution, which allowed candidates not campaigning to be automatically disqualified, suggesting instead that they should have the chance to remedy the situation.

Gutipatti supported the second and third points of the resolution but disagreed with the first part about the 50-vote requirement, as it could lead to unfilled seats and undemocratic selection processes. He also suggested that reaching out to the administrators in charge of campus elections to set up a meeting could help address these recurring issues.

Aremu discussed a past situation in 2019 where an error led to the suggestion of canceling election results, but concerns about the negative media impact and staff repercussions delayed action. He asked the group whether they should pursue canceling the results now. Richter expressed hesitance, deferring the decision to the group. Bennett added her concerns about the misuse of power in previous discussions and suggested improving transparency regarding financial disclosures for candidates, such as clarifying when candidates need to submit financial information. There's a suggestion to make this clearer earlier in the process to avoid delays in certification. Discussion also touches on how much money candidates should be expected to report, with the conclusion that only major campaigns, such as those for Undergraduate Student Government president and vice president, typically involve substantial spending.

Richter responded positively to Smith's suggestion regarding the next steps, which included updating a resolution framework and possibly holding a virtual vote on it. Smith suggested opening the document for feedback and involving the all-campus selection team for clarification. Richter agreed with these ideas and discussed adjusting the resolution to address the group's concerns. He proposed changes, such as adjusting the wording and considering additional steps like pushing back certification deadlines or requiring further outreach from candidates.

Aremu mentioned that they did not find a clear rule stating disqualification due to incomplete submissions, but Richter clarified that the election committee violated their own rules by disqualifying candidates without following the proper procedures. Richter expressed openness to making amendments to the resolution based on the group's input.

Gutipatti then proposed a plan where Richter would implement the changes over the weekend and then hold an electronic vote. Gutipatti noted that rejecting the entire election process seemed too extreme but was open to rejecting individual cases if necessary. Discussion continued about issues surrounding certain candidates, particularly with the Medical School, and the requirement for internet ID identifiers. There were differing views on how strictly to enforce rules, with some arguing for flexibility and others emphasizing the importance of adhering to the established guidelines.

Amber Bathke  
University Senate Office