

Disabilities Issues Committee
October 30, 2019
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:** Disability Data from the SERU and gradSERU; Update on Training on Supporting Students With Disabilities; Twin Cities Disability Resource Center Update; Next Steps on System Campus Access to Mental Health Services]

PRESENT: Ben Munson (chair), Jeff Baier, Jonathan Curoe, Kim Doberstein, Mary DeGrote Goering, Gayle Golden, Samantha Grover, Sanoa Hagen, Donna Johnson, Ryan Machtmes, Peggy Martin, Gail Myers, Jayanthi Sasisekaran, Deena Wassenberg

REGRETS: Kiel Harell, Matthew Hoekstra, Emily Norenberg, Lars Oddsson

ABSENT: Bryce Christiaansen, Muhammad Khalifa

GUESTS: Daniel Jones-White, managing director of the SERU Consortium, north america, research & development director, gradSERU Survey, and senior analyst, Office of Institutional Research; Krista Soria, assistant director, Research and Strategic Partnerships, SERU, and director, Student Affairs Assessment, Office of Student Affairs

OTHERS: Niamh Coomey, reporter, *Minnesota Daily*

1. Disability Data from the SERU and gradSERU

Professor Ben Munson, chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed Daniel Jones-White, and senior analyst, Office of Institutional Research and Krista Soria, director, Student Affairs Assessment, Office of Student Affairs. Soria and Jones-White had been invited to share data from the Student Experience at the Research University (SERU) survey, and its counterpart for graduate students, the gradSERU on the experiences of students with disabilities at the University.

Jones-White began by providing the committee with background information on the SERU and the SERU consortium. More detail is available in the [PowerPoint](#). He noted that a question allowing (but not requiring) students to disclose disability status had been added to the gradSERU in 2019, and about 10.5% of survey participants disclosed a disability (4.7% indicated that they did not wish to disclose whether they had a disability). Of this 10.5%, 64.6% said that they were receiving accommodations at the University for their disability. 4.4% said they were unaware of such services. He summarized some demographic differences related to students with disability and some data on disabled students' experiences compared to those without disabilities.

Next, Soria discussed data from the 2018 SERU. She noted, in particular, major themes that emerged from the open-ended questions:

- Faculty do not follow accommodations or believe students when they disclose they have a disability
- The campus needs more education about disabilities and mental illness as a disability
- The high pressure of campus life exacerbates mental health conditions

Many committee members reported hearing faculty verbalize the belief that students with non-apparent disabilities are “gaming the system.” Members also commented that these themes underscored the need for the mandatory training, which was approved by the University Senate the previous spring.

Ryan Machtmes noted that the questions on the SERU were much more specific than the ones on the gradSERU, and suggested that the questions from the SERU be replicated on the gradSERU. Jones-White said that they had not previously included that level of detail on the gradSERU because of concerns around sample size and anonymity, but there were ways to utilize the data in an aggregate fashion without compromising student privacy.

Jayanthi Sasisekaran asked how the data is shared with the public. Soria responded that the gradSERU data is available to anyone with a U of M internet ID shared via [Tableau](#), and that the SERU data is available on the [Office for Institutional Research website](#). However, qualitative data is not currently shared, because it sometimes includes information sufficient to identify a certain student. The time necessary to comb through and anonymize that data is prohibitive, she said.

Committee members expressed their sincere thanks for this data, noting that it would be helpful in making the case for mandatory training. Munson thanked Soria and Jones-White for the presentation, and they departed.

2. Update on Training on Supporting Students With Disabilities

Next, Munson updated members on the status of the aforementioned mandatory training. He noted that the provost was charging a task force to develop a plan for best practices for supporting students with disabilities, possibly to include mandatory training. He pointed out that the training on preventing sexual misconduct began with a task force, as well. Munson said that he was asked to be on the task force, and that Disabilities Issues would have an active voice and liaison.

3. Twin Cities Disability Resource Center Update

Next, Munson invited Donna Johnson, director, Disability Resource Center (DRC), Twin Cities, to give an update. She noted the following:

- The number of students using DRC services is increasing by a caseload every year
- Interpreting hours are going down, as more people are choosing captioning. Johnson has approval to hire a media captioning manager and two accessibility analysts.
- There is still not enough space for all the accommodated testing the DRC administers.
- Most of the University’s peer institutions do not provide access assistants to help students take notes, etc. The need is huge and few people apply to fill the positions.

Johnson has recently posted openings for “senior access assistants,” targeting college graduates, offering 40 hours of work per week, and including higher level work, in order to increase the pay and attract candidates to apply.

- Johnson is working on increasing awareness of what the University needs to do with regard to digital access. She will meet with senior leaders in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Office for Information Technology (OIT) on this issue.

Peggy Martin noted that libraries are trying to increase the number of electronic materials available, and asked whether that would help or increase the DRC’s workload. Johnson said that it depends on the system the student uses. Deena Wassenberg asked if online/electronic resources are generally accessible, and Johnson said no. When asked how to tell whether a resource is accessible or not, Johnson suggested running it through a screen reader. She noted that OIT and the DRC are developing a series of trainings on digital accessibility.

Finally, Johnson emphasized that it is crucial to change the culture around viewing the DRC as responsible for all accommodated testing and other accommodation needs. Access is a campus-wide responsibility, she said; we all need to think about creating an accessible campus.

4. Next Steps on System Campus Access to Mental Health Services

Next, Munson reminded members of the shortage of mental health services at system campus locations, particularly the rural campuses. He asked whether the DRCs on other campuses could put together data on what is available, usage, cost, etc. DRC staff said that they could try, but that gathering historical data may be difficult as it has to be pulled manually.

Martin asked whether there is a provost-level committee on issues impacting students and University community members with disabilities (including but not limited to mental health). Johnson said that there is not.

Wassenberg mentioned that she received a grant from the University Libraries to identify open access course materials for her courses, and no one mentioned that some of the materials might not be accessible. She suggested that having information on accessibility as part of that grant and the general effort around open access materials would be useful. She then asked whether there is a movement in the academic publishing industry to make their digital materials maximally flexible to be compatible with the most accessible technology. Johnson said that there is a policy group that works on overall access issues, which has been working on this issue for a while. The issue is that publishers are not mandated to create accessible materials, but universities are mandated to provide them. Munson noted that faculty could create a good incentive for publishers to offer accessible materials by not buying from those that don’t.

Hearing no further discussion, Munson adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office