

Disabilities Issues Committee
May 28, 2020
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:** Conversation with Incoming COGS President; COVID-19 Impacts on People with Disabilities]

PRESENT: Ben Munson (chair), Jeff Baier, Sanoa Hagen, Kim Doberstein, Donna Johnson, Ryan Machtmes, Peggy Martin, Gail Myers, Jayanthi Sasisekaran, Deena Wassenberg

REGRETS: Jonathan Curoe, Mary DeGrote Goering, Samantha Grover, Kiel Harell, Matthew Hoekstra, Muhammad Khalifa, Emily Norenberg, Lars Oddsson

ABSENT: Bryce Christiaansen

GUESTS: Brett Heischmidt, incoming president, Council of Graduate Students (COGS)

1. Conversation with Incoming COGS President

Professor Ben Munson, chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed Brett Heischmidt, incoming president, Council of Graduate Students (COGS). Heischmidt explained that he was looking at COGS' advocacy platform for the upcoming academic year, and that disability issues was one of the possibilities. He asked what COGS could do to support the committee and how the two could collaborate. Ryan Machtmes, on behalf of the Organization for Graduate and Professional Students with Disabilities (OGPSD), thanked Heischmidt for taking the time to have this conversation, and said that OGPSD looked forward to collaborating with COGS in the coming year. He recommended also connecting with the Disabled Student Cultural Center. He then added that he was working on a student safety and security omnibus resolution, of which one was an ad hoc, provost-level committee to evaluate and determine best practices for dealing with the issues of the scooters on campus and the impacts on students with disabilities. OGPSD is also looking to create a handbook on accommodations, Machtmes said.

Munson provided background information on the committee's [Resolution on Professional Development on Best Practices for Disability Accommodations and Supporting Students With Disabilities](#). He reported that the provost would establish a task force that would be charged with recommending how to implement the resolution, and that he would co-chair that committee. The task force has not yet been established, he said, due to the provostal transition, the presidential transition, COVID-19, etc.

2. COVID-19 Impacts on People With Disabilities

Next, Munson turned the conversation to issues that have come up related to disabilities due to COVID-19. He noted that although decisions had not yet been made about fall, it seemed clear

that at least some courses would need to include some sort of distance learning. He noted that distance learning likely disproportionately affects people with disabilities. On the other hand, a physical return to campus could also disproportionately affect those with disabilities, and could in fact lead to more individuals (such as those who are immunocompromised) needing accommodations to minimize potential exposure to the coronavirus. The latter raises concerns about the Disability Resource Center (DRC)'s workload.

Donna Johnson reported that staff from the DRC and the Office of Human Resources were currently drafting responses to FAQs on disabilities and COVID-19. Basically, she said, if the person had a documented disability, they would go through the interactive process with the DRC. However, she continued, supervisors also have leeway to make flexible arrangements on their own. Peggy Martin noted that per the Office of the General Council (OGC), learners with concerns about learning in a clinical setting because of COVID-19 will need to consult with the DRC before being offered any accommodations.

Munson then asked members what they had observed regarding change due to COVID-19 related to disability:

- Dependence on technology has been heightened
- The reduction in acoustic and visual information on video affects communication - disproportionately affects people with a broad range of disabilities
- Zoom and Canvas are not meeting the needs of people with sensory disabilities
- Some colleges have highly recommended (but not mandated) that instructors complete a summer bootcamp on online instruction. There is also coursework available through the Office of Information Technology in digital accessibility.
- People are focused on just getting their course content online; need to also consider accessibility
- Zoom's auto transcription function is pretty good, but not always accurate
- The camera angle is important for sign language
- Some professors are having trouble with accommodations in the online space; this is a pain point for students
- There is intentional non-compliance with and hostility toward people with disabilities and accommodation needs in the professional programs. Students are hesitant to reveal their accommodation needs. This has been accentuated in the time of COVID-19.
- Crookston has been doing online learning for many years, but changing to *all* online has been difficult, especially for students with learning disabilities. Those with print-related disabilities are struggling the most.
- Mental Health is a big issue; need to be flexible.
- Students doing online learning often want to work during the day, but then need help in the evenings. That has caused some problems with labor unions, etc.
- When/if the University returns to in person instruction in the fall, it would be good to wear masks, but that also blocks the visual cues for people who are deaf/hard of hearing. There are some masks with clear plastic that don't fog up; this could help that issue.
- Some people cannot wear masks due to disability reasons. The DRC is working on how to address that.

- The discussion should be framed in terms of universal design. Some of these things are good for everyone involved.
- The DRC has been trying to identify what has been useful and effective for students with disabilities, and students in general, in this situation. There is some difficulty providing certain testing accommodations in the remote learning setting.
- The gradSERU COVID-19 special survey is being administered at the University; there are disability related questions. The DRC is surveying those registered, and there are many other surveys. Munson suggested inviting Katie Lust, director of research, Boynton Health, and/or Professor Pat Frazier of the Stress and Trauma Lab to a subsequent committee meeting
- COVID is likely only the beginning of a pattern of global pandemics; it is important for the University to have some sort of “post-op evaluation” after the crisis, particularly with regard to students with disabilities

Hearing no further discussion, Munson thanked members for their engagement and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office