
The University Senate

FACULTY · STUDENT · P&A · CIVIL SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

P&A Consultative Committee (PACC)

October 17, 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:** Digital Accessibility; Civil Service Consultative Committee Report; Subcommittee Reports; PEAK Update; Nominating P&A Reps for Workforce Reinvestment Resolution Work Groups; Open P&A Seat on Benefits Advisory Committee; Topics for December P&A Senate Meeting]

PRESENT: Kit Breshears (chair), Toni Abts (chair-elect), Chris Abts, Alex Bajcz, Molly Bendzick, Erin Fider, Angela Haeg, Monica Kocon, Brian Olmsted

ABSENT: Whitney Taha Frakes

REGRETS: Deirdre Opp

OTHERS: Jaclyn Adair, senate associate, University Senate Office; Keith Brown, senior director of academic technology, Office of Information Technology; John Butler, University of Minnesota Retirees Association; Laurie Cooper Stoll, director, University Senate Office; Khaled Musa, director, Office for Digital Accessibility; Tina Marisam, director and Title IX coordinator, Equal Opportunity and Title IX

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kit Breshears, chair, called the meeting to order and invited PACC members to introduce themselves.

2. Digital Accessibility

Next, Breshears turned the floor to Tina Marisam and the digital accessibility team. Marisam introduced herself and her colleague, Khaled Musa, who shared [a slide deck](#) with the committee. She highlighted upcoming changes stemming from new regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Justice. These regulations, which fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), mandate that all digital content at the University complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, Level AA, by April 2026.

Marisam emphasized that this shift is a significant step forward, as it replaces the current system, where accessibility is encouraged, with a proactive requirement to ensure all digital content is inherently accessible. She outlined the scope of compliance, covering websites, course materials, digital documents, and media, and described examples of necessary changes, such as improved color contrast, the use of alternative text for images, and captions for videos. While there are limited exceptions, the University will still need to provide accommodations when exceptions apply.

Musa explained that the new regulations integrate digital accessibility explicitly into ADA Title II, aligning it with physical accessibility. To meet these requirements, the University has created a strategic plan centered on a "3 R" approach: **remove** unused content, **revise** existing materials through prioritization and training, and **right-first** for future content creation. He noted that achieving 100% compliance is not feasible, but the University aims to foster a culture where everyone strives for continuous improvement. He provided detail on the University's resources, including training opportunities like the DA Badging series and partnerships with academic technologists and developers. He emphasized the importance of leveraging collaboration across departments and campuses to sustain accessibility efforts system-wide.

Following the presentation, members raised concerns about practical implementation, such as designing accessible websites and using vendor-provided tools. Musa reassured the group that his office is equipped to assist with training, testing, and compliance verification, particularly for vendor-related challenges. He highlighted the need for thoughtful selection of accessible materials, especially in cases involving external or third-party resources.

Musa concluded with an affirmation of the University's commitment to fostering accessibility and inclusion, emphasizing working intentionally with different partners across the system in a sustainable way going forward.

3. Civil Service Consultative Committee Report

Cole Hanson, chair elect of the Civil Service Consultative Committee and Civil Service Senate, was unable to attend the meeting. He provided a written report in the [reports document](#). Breshears invited members to read it in their own time.

4. Subcommittee Reports

Benefits & Compensation (*Monica Kocon and Brian Olmsted, co-chairs*)

- Katie Kolodge from OHR Benefits presented updates on open enrollment, which is scheduled from November 1 to November 30. This included highlights of the upcoming benefits changes for 2025. Additionally, members completed homework to collect input from P&A constituents, which will guide the committee's focus for the year. Updates on "power topics" were postponed, as the scheduled presenter was unavailable. These combined efforts aim to shape the agenda for the remainder of the semester.

Communications (*Angela Haeg and Deirdre Opp, co-chairs*)

- The subcommittee's first meeting focused on streamlining communication and improving workflow. Discussions included the possibility of using Zoom AI tools to generate summaries of senate meeting minutes, which would reduce the burden on note-takers. A survey may be distributed to gauge senate members' opinions on this approach. Member's tasks included updating constituent lists and organizing them into an

accessible spreadsheet. Three newsletters are planned for the year (November, February, and May), with an updated info graphic scheduled for March. While content for the first meeting recap is ready, it awaits additional input from Government Relations, which will focus on advocacy for the University of Minnesota's legislative requests.

Outreach (*Chris Abts and Erin Fider, co-chairs*)

- The Outreach subcommittee held their first meeting on October 8 where tasks were assigned to send welcome emails to new P&A staff. Efforts are underway to fill vacant Senate and alternate seats, including the potential appointment of interim senators until the next election. A strategic plan is being developed to fill seats at units like Crookston, which currently lack representation. The subcommittee also aims to collaborate with the Communications Subcommittee to include a recruitment-focused statement in the November newsletter. The goal is to ensure all vacant seats are filled by December. Breshears will help facilitate connections with the system campuses and Extension representatives to enhance outreach.

Professional Development & Enrichment (*Molly Bendzick and Alex Bajcz, co-chairs*)

- The PD&E subcommittee identified topics for professional development webinars and policy discussions. Ideas include events on the new Indigenous research policy, digital accessibility compliance, mental health benefits, and intersections between the tobacco-free campus policy and cultural practices like smudging. The subcommittee acknowledged challenges in securing speakers for these sessions and welcomed suggestions for experts. Collaborative opportunities with other subcommittees, such as Benefits & Compensation, were identified to strengthen the impact of events. Alex Bajcz invited members to contribute to the [PD&E planning document](#). He also noted gaps in the P&A Senate meeting schedule and proposed sending an email for timely communication about upcoming events.

5. PEAK Update

Breshears provided an update on the PEAK initiative which was presented to the Board of Regents at their October 10 meeting. He acknowledged the limited but meaningful feedback gathered through recent surveys. Although only a small number of responses were submitted, key insights were highlighted. Regent Mary Turner, known for her outspoken nature, raised significant concerns about the program during a Board of Regents discussion. Specifically, she questioned whether the PEAK initiative was intended to undermine unions.

Ken Horstman's presentation drew criticism for its use of data. Members noted that while the presentation emphasized favorable percentages, these were derived from a very small sample size, potentially misrepresenting the program's reception. This raised questions about transparency and the validity of the metrics used to evaluate the program's success.

Concerns about communication and engagement were also voiced. Molly Bendzick shared that the AFSCME Local 3800 president was initially unaware of Horstman's PEAK presentation to the Board until she forwarded the email from Breshears. This lack of communication led to significant concerns within the union, which questioned the accuracy and intent behind the data presented, particularly regarding workforce feedback and perceived union-related implications.

President Cunningham, despite her limited time in office, reiterated her commitment to transparency concerning the initiative. However, her response was seen as measured, reflecting the constraints of her short tenure. Members discussed broader concerns about the program's

impact, noting that while no formal job eliminations have occurred, some employees have voluntarily left their roles due to dissatisfaction with PEAK's implementation.

The meeting also revealed frustration over the significant financial investment in the PEAK program. Breshears commented on Huron Consulting Services and the \$10 million price tag for their consultations, questioning whether the ongoing costs of the initiative were justified given the University's budget constraints.

To address these concerns, members recommended increasing transparency and engagement. Suggestions included hosting open forums or anonymous surveys to gather broader feedback and involving the University Senate in the process. It was emphasized that accurate and equitable communication about PEAK should be prioritized across all units. Breshears stressed the importance of maintaining open communication channels and sharing constituent feedback with leadership and the Board of Regents. Members hope to ensure that the PEAK program evolves in a way that genuinely benefits the University community.

6. Nominating P&A Reps for Workforce Reinvestment Resolution Work Groups

Breshears shared excerpts of an email from Kate Stuckert who is requesting four P&A staff to serve on work groups of the Workforce Reinvestment Resolution. Breshears invited nominations from members for the following positions:

1. One staff member for the benefits work group such as a member or co-chair of the Benefits & Compensation Subcommittee;
2. Two P&A instructors to serve on a faculty/P&A instruction work group;
3. One staff member to serve on a staff success work group.

7. Filling Open P&A Seat on Benefits Advisory Committee

The [Benefits Advisory Committee](#) (BAC) has an opening for a P&A staff member. The BAC is not housed under the University Senate umbrella, although the senate office provides an associate for support. There are currently four P&A staff serving on the committee including Brian Olmstead. P&A staff interested in serving should complete this [BAC Interest form](#).

Olmstead added that the BAC seeks diverse voices to provide broader perspectives, mentioning that the committee met earlier in the day to provide updates on benefits. The committee is particularly looking to include voices that reflect varied experiences and priorities. Breshears emphasized the importance of engaging individuals from system campuses like Crookston, Rochester, Morris, and Duluth, as well as those from Extension roles. He noted that these groups often have direct connections with community stakeholders, which could bring valuable insights to governance discussions. He also advocated for intentional diversity in committee membership, stressing that differing viewpoints enhance committee effectiveness.

8. Discussion: Topics for December P&A Senate Meeting

Breshears received a request from Keeya Steele of Government and Community Relations and University of Minnesota Advocates. She proposed providing content for newsletters or visiting the senate to discuss their advocacy work. He noted that recent guests Christine Kiel and Melisa Lopez Franzen had already effectively encouraged engagement in government relations at the September P&A Senate meeting. He suggested deferring Steele's involvement to spring unless there were objections. Members agreed with this plan.

Breshears invited members to provide additional topics for the December senate meeting. One member suggested PELRA in the chat. Bendzick proposed revisiting the University's wellness program, pending updates on the premium benefits reduction initiative. She expressed interest in hearing from the new wellness program coordinator about the program's current status and future direction. Olmsted expanded the discussion, stressing the need for clarity on the strategic goals of the wellness program. He highlighted the importance of understanding its purpose, outcomes, and challenges rather than focusing solely on surface-level changes. Alex Bajcz shared his appreciation for the wellness program due to its ease of use with his smartwatch. However, he acknowledged inequities such as the program being more accessible to those who can afford fitness trackers. Breshears suggested inviting Julie Tonneson to discuss the University budget, where the money comes from and where it is spent.

9. Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Breshears adjourned the meeting.

Jaclyn Adair
University Senate Office