
The University Senate

FACULTY • STUDENT • P&A • CIVIL SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Senate Committee On Information Technologies (SCIT)

March 3, 2025

Minutes of the Meeting

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[In these minutes: Update on Course Works; Discussion Regarding Permanent Opt-Out Feature for the New Course Works Program]

PRESENT: Michelle Driessen, chair, Kaylee Brosius, Keith Brown, Adolfo Carrillo Cabello, Bernard Gulachek, Michael Manno, Natasha Monsaas-Daly, Angie Ohler, Emily Ronning, Jason Roy, Cassandra Scharber, Mani Subramani, William Tantzen, George Vinals, Alisha Wackerie-Hollman, Eric Watkins

REGRETS: Yi Zhu

ABSENT: Dehkontee Cuppah, Andrew Gallia, Liibaan Engel, Carter Johnson, Engin Sungar

OTHERS ATTENDING: Chris Larson, special operations manager, Bookstores, Shane Nackerud, director, affordable learning and open education, University Libraries, Sam Schmall, UMD representative, Student Senate, Laurie Cooper Stoll, director, University

Senate Office, Aidan Zeissler, academic affairs officer, UMD Student Government Association

1. Welcome

Professor Michelle Driessen, chair, called the meeting to order.

2. Update on Course Works

Chris Larson, special operations manager, Bookstores, and Shane Nackerud, director, affordable learning and open education, University Libraries, then gave a presentation to the committee entitled, "[Course Works Update](#)."

Larson described Course Works as a cascading model offering a flat rate of \$279 per semester for course materials, with options to opt into a selective model or opt out entirely. Non-degree-seeking undergraduates are automatically entered into the selective model. The program aims to ensure day-one access to materials and prioritized low-cost resources through library collaboration. Participation rates are 85%, with 60% opting out initially but many returning through the selective model. Crookston campus had higher participation due to its digital focus and past inclusive access programs. Library materials comprise 22% of unique ISBNs, and print materials remain common. Technological complexities and launch issues posed challenges initially, but improvements were seen in the spring semester.

The library's involvement in Course Works increased its insight into instructors' material choices. In fall 2024, library materials made up 32% of Course Works items, serving 19,568 students with a 67% participation rate. The library's Canvas course materials pages include articles, book chapters, ebooks, and streaming media, integrated alongside bookstore materials. The library estimates significant student savings, though challenges include the workload of entering materials into two systems and access restrictions. Successes include better collaboration across University of Minnesota Libraries and EBSCO's decision to grant system-wide ebook access.

The committee discussed the digital-first initiative, with members appreciating the progress. Larson explained that setup times for instructors vary based on workload, publisher partnerships, and digital rights, with self-service options in development. Nackerud noted that while instructors could compile reading lists, most preferred the library's assistance due to accessibility and copyright compliance.

Driessen asked if transferring reading lists to the centralized system duplicated instructors' previous work. Nackerud clarified that the library's services improved accessibility and compliance. Adolfo Carrillo Cabello inquired about digital-first messaging and onboarding, with Larson acknowledging the need for better communication of cost savings. Despite continued print use, 85% of the program's materials were digital.

Mike Manno asked if courses using only library materials should use Course Works or Canvas's library materials link. Nackerud explained that Course Works could integrate library reading lists, allowing students to weigh costs and choose between Course Works Complete or Select. Larson emphasized that faculty should provide information on all materials, leaving students to decide based on cost.

Driessen asked how the bookstore determined which instructors received support. Larson clarified that certain materials like lab supplies and uncontrollable access items were excluded, with fee-based systems available instead. Driessen expressed frustration over instructors managing materials independently and asked if the committee could review the faculty survey results. Nackerud explained that the results were delayed due to unforeseen circumstances but would be shared soon.

3. Discussion Regarding Permanent Opt-Out Feature for the New Course Works Program

Sam Schmall, UMD representative, Student Senate and Aidan Zeissler, academic affairs officer, UMD Student Government Association, then spoke to the committee about the [CourseWorks Permanent Opt-Out Resolution](#).

The issue gained attention in spring 2024 when 100 UMD faculty members signed an open letter expressing concerns about Course Works, particularly the program's digital-first approach. Faculty cited research suggesting that students learn better with print materials and emphasized that certain classes required physical resources. In response, UMD's Student Government Association passed a resolution advising the administration to pause Course Works implementation, though no official action followed. A petition against Course Works gathered 1,400 student signatures, representing approximately 15% of the student body.

In fall 2024, the student government unanimously passed a resolution calling for the permanent opt-out feature, citing the needs of art students, nontraditional students, part-time students, and those facing challenges with financial aid or navigating Course Works pages. The Morris Student Association conducted a survey among faculty and students, while UMD student government held meetings with Paige Roman, associate vice president of university services, and Mike Herrick, UMD bookstore director. Additionally, a one-night survey hosted by the Academic Affairs Committee garnered 203 responses, with 91.6% supporting a permanent individual opt-out feature. Throughout the year, the student representatives continued discussions with university officials to advocate for student concerns.

Zeissler explained that a permanent opt-out feature for Course Works would benefit the University of Minnesota system. Despite claims that part-time, nontraditional, and online students were automatically opted into Course Works Select, some were mistakenly enrolled in Course Works Complete, potentially imposing unnecessary costs. Graduate students, who were informed they were not part of the program, were automatically enrolled in the past two semesters. The fast-paced start of the semester often caused students to miss the drop deadline, which was a common complaint.

Course Works Complete and Select only covered books and excluded costs for upper-level STEM courses, art supplies, and online lab notebooks, creating financial burdens for students whose primary expenses were materials not included in the program. The lack of transparent pricing led to confusion, as the system did not

consistently display updated prices when students opted out of materials. The system also tended to select more expensive textbook versions and only offered eBooks, which did not suit all learning preferences.

Additionally, the program prevented students from sharing textbooks due to online homework modules being tied to specific access codes. Data collected from UMD and UM Morris indicated student support for a permanent opt-out feature, with a system-wide questionnaire in development. Schmall concluded that a permanent opt-out would better serve students, allowing them to make a one-time decision to opt out for the duration of their college career. The representatives sought feedback from the committee, especially Course Works staff, to help address student concerns and improve understanding of the program.

Adolfo Carrillo Cabello raised concerns about the use of the word “permanent” in the resolution and suggested gathering student narratives through surveys to strengthen their argument. Zeissler clarified that “permanent opt out” meant switching the program to an opt-in model for certain students, giving them more control over their participation.

Nackerud and Larson discussed how the opt-out model enabled the university to negotiate lower prices with publishers, as higher participation numbers secured better deals. Shifting to an opt-in model could raise prices for those who remained in the program. Driessen supported the permanent opt-out option, acknowledging that students might forget to opt out each semester, resulting in unexpected charges. Eric Watkins asked whether a large number of part-time students opting out would impact pricing. Larson replied that the impact would depend on the number of students opting out and how the publishers viewed the situation.

Carrillo Cabello questioned the effectiveness of reminders used to prompt students to opt out, suggesting that the visibility and frequency of these prompts could be improved. He also encouraged Schmall and Zeissler to continue their efforts in representing student interests.

4. Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Driessen adjourned the meeting.

Laurie Cooper Stoll

University Senate Office