

Senate Committee on Information Technologies (SCIT)
March 15, 2021
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:** Welcome and Introductions; Accessibility and Accommodation; APLUS Advising System and Data Collection]

PRESENT: Geoffrey Ghose (chair), Keith Brown, Brent Christensen, Santiago Fernandez-Gimenez, Bernard Gulachek, Jonathan Koffel, Kelvin Lim, Zachary Riffle, Robert Rubinyi, Cassandra Scharber, Engin Sungar, Whitney Taha Frakes, Jamie Wascalus, Yoichi Watanabe

REGRETS: Lauren Martin, Kate McCready, Rielle Swanson

ABSENT: Pilar Karaca-Mandic, Lindsey Konerza, Gustav Kuhnen

GUESTS: Sohail Akhavein, manager, Student Access, Disability Resource Center, Ilene Alexander, education program specialist, Center for Educational Innovation; Colin Delong, director, University Data and Institutional Reporting; Beth Lingren Clark, associate vice provost for Strategic Enrollment Initiatives, Office of Undergraduate Education; Scott Marshall, associate director, Disability Resource Center; Kate Martin, interim co-director, Center for Educational Innovation; Khaled Musa, academic technologist, Office of Information Technology; Stacy Tidball, director, Continuity and Compliance, Academic Support Resources, Office of Undergraduate Education

OTHERS: Cody Hanson, Steve Marvets

1. Welcome and Introductions

Professor Geoffrey Ghose, chair, welcomed committee members and guests. He briefly reviewed the topics on the agenda and introduced today's guest speakers.

2. Accessibility and Accommodation

Scott Marshall, associate director, Disability Resource Center (DRC), serving as moderator, introduced the PowerPoint titled [Accessibility, Accommodations, and Effective Practices for Inclusive Learning Experiences](#).

Marshall then invited committee members to answer for themselves the following question: "What is important about inclusive learning experiences for you?" Marshall noted that when people are seen for their strengths, an invitation to belong exists. An inclusive student experience is not only about accommodation, but about sharing one's unique, personal gifts, Marshall said. That is the goal of the DRC - making sure that everyone has a way to participate and be included, not just "fit into" an existing situation.

Marshall then invited Sohail Akhavein, manager, Student Access, DRC, to talk about accommodation work in a digitally accessible world. Akhavein said that at the University, someone with a disability should have the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services with substantially equivalent ease of use as someone without a disability. He carefully delineated the differences between accessibility and accommodation, essentially showing how accessibility is proactive while accommodation is reactive, and acknowledging that both are needed.

Akhavein noted that, especially since the onset of the pandemic, use of the DRC by both students and faculty has increased significantly. To address the growing need, the DRC is partnering with the Center for Educational Innovation (CEI), faculty, and staff to better understand what is needed in classroom settings. In the PowerPoint presentation (slides 6-10), Akhavein listed many of the barriers, impacts, and concerns that have been identified since the University community pivoted to online instruction in March of 2020.

Ghose commented that the percentage of his students requesting accommodations is increasing every term. He asked the presenters: “Has the *number* of students requiring accommodation actually increased, or has our *awareness* of the need increased?” Akhavein explained that when the structure of in-person classes disappeared because the pandemic necessitated the pivot to on-line learning, many students did struggle and underlying disabilities or disability-related issues were exacerbated.

Daniela Sandler asked, “How can the University envision a version of online learning that is more carefully considered compared to the rather haphazardly approach necessitated by the onset of the pandemic?” Akhavein agreed that more consideration must now be given to how on-line learning will move forward at the University. He said significant information has been gathered in the past year as to what has and has not been successful and that data will inform the University’s steps forward in further developing its on-line learning initiatives.

Khaled Musa, academic technologist, Office of Information Technology (OIT), continued the [presentation](#) (begin on slide 10). He said his department supports faculty in using technology in ways that are inclusive for the largest number of students, frequently reminding instructors that “accessibility is essential for some, useful for all.” Musa outlined, in this portion of the presentation, seven core skills that would assist faculty members and instructors in making their classes more accessible.

Musa then handed the presentation off to Kate Martin, interim co-director, CEI. Martin stressed that the University community has the opportunity to lean in and proactively design courses that create a sense of belonging for all students. She described accessible and learning-focused course design as one that encompasses the following four points:

- Aims - what will the students be expected to learn?
- Activities - how do we allow students to practice what they are learning?
- Assessment - acceptable evidence that students *have* learned what is being taught
- Atmosphere - what does our learning environment look like and how do we work together?

As on-line learning course development continues, Martin noted, the following things should be considered:

- Universal design for learning
- Flexibility
- A climate of belonging
- Digital accessibility
- Pedagogical strategies listed in [Teaching with access and inclusion](#), created collaboratively by the CEI and the DRC

Marshall thanked the presenters and summed up by saying that before accessibility is a technology issue, it is a *people* issue, and the University has challenging decisions to make as to how best to support its entire community with limited resources.

Whitney Taha Frakes asked if the work done by the DRC impacts admission requirements or eligibility practices. Akhavein said the DRC does work with the Office of Admissions to ensure that language regarding disability is included on its diversity statement page. Marshall added that for staff hiring processes, digital accessibility should be incorporated into the entire human resources life cycle: it should be a part of position descriptions, interview questions, professional development, and annual reviews.

Ghose said that, if the University hopes to have faculty proactively engaged, there needs to be better support for faculty who have to undertake the enormous amount of work required to make courses accessible. He gave an example of one of his classes with roughly 100 students, 14 of whom require time exemptions, which he must implement manually in Canvas. Marshall said that he does appreciate Ghose's concern, and realizes there is the need to reinvigorate the channel of communication between the DRC and faculty.

Ghose thanked the presenters and moved on to the next agenda item.

3. APLUS Advising System and Data Collection

Beth Lingren Clark, associate vice provost for strategic enrollment initiatives, Office of Undergraduate Education, introduced her colleagues, Colin Delong, director, University Data and Institutional Reporting, and Stacy Tidball, director, Continuity and Compliance, Academic Support Resources, Office of Undergraduate Education, and began the [presentation](#). She said the reason for presenting at SCIT today is to increase awareness of the use of Canvas data and how it is being leveraged to impact student success.

Lingren-Clark then handed the presentation to Tidball who said that learning analytics is a very broad and multi-faceted conversation at the University. Student data analytics can be obtained from a number of sources, including the following:

- DISCOVER (University of Minnesota Rochester Campus)
- Unizen collaborations
- Canvas reports
- Pilot program called [MyLA](#) from the Learning Analytics DiaLOG group
- Various governance groups that have sprung up around digital analytics projects

Next, Lingren-Clark listed some of the ways in which learning analytics data aggregated by the APLUS tool may be used to increase student success:

- Metrics in the M pact 2025 Systemwide Strategic Plan
- Twin Cities strategic enrollment plan
- Student retention and graduation rates
- Closing achievement gaps with underserved students
- Serves as a case management tool for student advisors and counselors

DeLong then gave a general definition of learning analytics: “Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purpose of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs (*Society for Learning Analytics Research*). DeLong said that most of the learning analytics data gathered at the University is held in Canvas, the University’s learning management system, and falls into three categories:

- Ferpa protected data
- Publicly available data
- Course content (teaching materials, content of forums, chat logs, homework questions and answers, etc.)

DeLong shared some of the ways that data gathered with the APLUS system assisted in student success and retention during the pivot to remote instruction. The data can be broken out in a number of different ways to assist advisors in developing tailored approaches to individual students rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, DeLong said.

Lingren-Clark then invited questions and comments from the committee. Bob Rubinyi asked; “When data indicates that a student is having difficulty, is that information mediated by a faculty member and advisor before going directly to the student?” DeLong said that currently, information that is gathered is a summary of all courses a student is taking, and is provided to the academic advisor but not individual faculty or instructors.

Ghose suggested that certain data, collected by these objective measures, could be helpful for the faculty or instructor as they create or re-shape course material. Tidball agreed, and noted that there are many discussions around exactly that type of information taking place in numerous learning analytics groups across the system.

Ghose thanked the guests, and, in the interest of time, adjourned the meeting.

Geanette Poole
University Senate Office