

[In these minutes: Tuition discussion, CC visit dates, Alcohol Task Force update, Proposed Student Senate numbers, Issues for spring semester, February 26 Student Senate agenda]

STUDENT SENATE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (SSCC) MINUTES

FEBRUARY 5, 2004

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Dan Weiske (chair), Sean Bell, Joshua Colburn, James Kanten, Levi Kary, Scott LeBlanc, Charles Stech, Jeremy Steil, Adam VanWagner.

ABSENT: Derek Brunsberg.

GUESTS: Craig Swan.

1. TUITION DISCUSSION WITH VICE PROVOST CRAIG SWAN

Vice Provost Craig Swan joined the meeting to discuss tuition and distributed a table showing tuition increases for the past one, five, and ten years, compared across the Big Ten institutions, for undergraduates and graduate students, including both residents and nonresidents. He noted that this is the third year of double-digit tuition increases for the University, and the pattern will continue next year. However, it is possible that the tuition increase will be the same amount for residents and nonresidents next year, which would provide a slight break for nonresidents.

The President does not like the continued increase and is looking for ways to save costs while still improving student services. These efforts grow increasingly harder after the state budget cut last year. Currently the state only spends four percent of its budget on higher education. 10-15 years ago, it spent 8-9 percent of its budget, which is a large disinvestment in public education. The Republican philosophy has been to give money back to people so they can decide where to spend it, but this approach does not work to fund higher education.

Vice Provost Swan said that there are several advantages to higher tuition. First, because students pay more, they should come to expect more from the University in return. Second, the University is still making improvements, which is a trend not being seen at many other public institutions.

He stated that an administrative group is looking at long-term solutions to tuition and they are interested in hearing any ideas from students. One item being discussed is better promotion of the tuition guarantee option available to freshmen which allows students to pay a flat fee for four years. Initially, the student pays more than other students, but the goal is for the student to pay less over a four year span. If the student ends up paying more during those four years, the difference is refunded to them.

Q: Why do more students not sign up for this option?

A: One option is that students may feel that the initial difference is too high. Another factor may be that the plan explanation is just one of many pieces of mail that students receive after being admitted. Only two parents asked about the plan during last summer's orientations.

Q: How does the University decide the cost for the plan?

A: It looks at trends and makes an institutional forecast.

Q: Is there a limit to how many students can participate?

A: A limit was set at inception, which does not make sense, but the plan does not enroll close to the cap at this time.

Vice Provost Swan said that a program of this type was mandated for institutions in Illinois. The problem with their plan is that if state support is cut, tuition increases can only be passed onto freshmen since all other students are guaranteed a set rate. That program might account for bigger peaks and slopes in tuition, but it is still too early to tell.

Q: Is there something special about Michigan and its funding for higher education?

A: Actually, Michigan provides less state support to higher education than here.

Q: What does the University think about the proposed congressional tuition cap?

A: The proposed plan would penalize institutions that continually increase tuition at over two times the Consumer Price Index. This type of price control is not a good thing. Most industries have been able to cut costs through machine-enhanced productivity. However, public education requires personal service, which always costs more to produce the end result. Restrictive tuition increase laws in Colorado for the last 10 years are now starting to affect those institutions.

Q: Is the University concerned about audits of higher education?

A: No since an audit of University salaries will be available next week and it shows that the University is in-line on this issue.

Q: Has the University discussed consolidating programs between campuses?

A: The bigger issue is consolidating campus rather than programs since core courses, such as English, still need to be taught at each campus. Historically, the University has invested in more campuses than other states. The University also knows that it is very hard to close out-state campuses.

Q: Do some programs have an excess of tenured faculty compared to the number of students in the program?

A: The student-faculty ratio varies across programs to reflect the nature of each program. However, this data is public and can be reviewed.

Q: Are increases in tuition going to pay instruction costs or being used somewhere else?

A: There is no college that covers the entire cost of instructional by tuition dollars alone. Most tuition dollars stay in the colleges, however a University fee was instituted to provide resources for central services. New sections of classes are meant to be self-funding, however some areas are less lucrative and require additional support. Some portion of tuition is also being put into financial aid to support Pell and state grants by protecting low-income students.

2. FINALIZE CC VISIT DATES

Dan Weiske proposed February 12 as the date to visit Duluth and March 11 as the date to visit Crookston. Responses would be requested via email.

3. ALCOHOL TASK FORCE UPDATE

Charles Stech said that the task force discussed a trial zone or events on each campus where alcohol would be served, such as a gallery show. Following the event, a campus survey would be conducted to evaluate students' response.

4. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED STUDENT SENATE NUMBERS

Dan Weiske said that at the last reorganization meeting, a proposal giving each college or campus a minimum of two senators was discussed. For the students, there is some concern that colleges that currently cannot fill one seat, would now have two seats vacant each year. Members felt that most work happens in committees anyway, and that students can make a statement with the numbers in the current proposal.

5. ISSUES FOR SPRING SEMESTER

Members discussed the following topics for spring semester agendas:

- Accountability
- College governance minutes on-line
- Alcohol
- Teaching evaluations
- Housing
- Student fees review
- Advising
- Graduation rate improvement
- Late-night bussing and Auxiliary Services
- Review of SSCC performance
- Student Senate budget

6. FEBRUARY 26 STUDENT SENATE AGENDA

The committee discussed an agenda item on student lobby. Speakers could include: Mike Dean from University Relations explaining lobbying strategies and student involvement; Senator Pappas as the chair of the Senate Education Committee; and Representative Stang as chair of the House Higher Education Committee. A second agenda item could be late-night programming, with speakers being the organizers of these events.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Adam VanWagner reported that the Student Affairs Committee is discussing involvement in the periodic review of the Student Conduct Code. It also sent a housing questionnaire to each campus, and has heard from everyone but Crookston. The committee is focusing on safe and affordable housing, information for student's moving off campus, and information as to why students leave residential housing. The Student Services Fee Subcommittee will also meet this year.

With no further business, Dan Weiske thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Becky Hippert
University Senate