
The University Senate

FACULTY · STUDENT · P&A · CIVIL SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Disabilities Issues Committee February 23, 2022 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:** External Review of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts at the University; Announcements; Resources for Students in Recovery; Letter to Provost about Lessons Learned During the Pandemic]

PRESENT: David Johnson (chair), Jeff Baier, Erin Durban, Mary Goering, Gayle Golden, Jessica Grittner, Jeremy Jenkins, Donna Johnson, Jennifer McComas, Ben Munson, Kirby Newhouse, Deena Wassenberg

REGRETS: Sanoa Hagen, Dadee Saye

ABSENT: Kiel Harell, Tim Walters

GUESTS: Jane Tuohy, Salome Raheim, Wilbur Harrington, and Liza Cariaga-Lo, Cambridge Hill Partners

1. External Review of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts at the University

Professor David Johnson, chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed [Jane Tuohy](#), [Salome Raheim](#), [Wilbur Harrington](#), and [Liza Cariaga-Lo](#), who were present from Cambridge Hill Partners (CHP). CHP had been hired to conduct an external review of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts at the University. Specifically, Tuohy explained, they were tasked with identifying the actions, programs, and initiatives most likely to support achievement of [MPACT 25](#) Commitment #4 regarding community and belonging. To that end, the reviewers had been asked to map current activities, identify gaps, assess the alignment of all DEI leadership and working groups, and review the system-wide DEI infrastructure. They asked members to comment on two questions.

In answer to the first question, “What are the areas where you have made the most progress and had the highest impact (been most proud of) in the DEI work at the University overall, and then particularly as they pertain to the work of your committee?” members offered the following comments:

- Over the last few years, this committee has brought disability justice and universal access to the forefront, as well as conversations about doing beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
- This committee was also instrumental in pushing for mandatory professional development for instructors on supporting students with disabilities, which the provost is currently considering.
- The [President's Postdoctoral Fellows Program](#), the [Critical Disabilities Studies Collective](#), [Teaching with Access and Inclusion](#), the Digital Accessibility Badging program through the Office of Information Technology (OIT), and the [Center for Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender and Sexuality Studies](#) were noted as particularly effective programs or organizations.

In response to “Where are the areas of improvement on DEI work to be done at the University?” committee members offered the following suggestions:

- In conversations about diversity and inclusion, disability is often overlooked.
- There is a lot of focus on mental health currently, but the connection to disability is often not made.
- After the Floyd murder, there was a lot of momentum around DEI issues, but now some of these initiatives are struggling to move forward.
- Things move slowly at the University. Student activists are at the University for a relatively short time, and often get frustrated/disillusioned with the U. The administration should fast track certain initiatives and be clear about what can be accomplished quickly.
- More needs to be done to create a supportive environment for faculty and staff from marginalized groups, and to create pipelines for graduate students to join the faculty.
- The DRC is primarily focused on compliance due to lack of resources; they do not have the bandwidth to look at other issues such as best practices, universal design, etc.
- There is a lack of awareness and understanding of disability issues and resistance to using accessible techniques, even though they were widely used throughout the pandemic. There is a concern about losing some of those gains just because people want to just go back to the way things used to be.

Tuohy, Raheim, and Harrington thanked members for their input and departed.

2. Announcements

Donna Johnson announced that she is stepping down from the role of director of the Twin Cities DRC. Members thanked her for her many years of excellent leadership and wished her well.

Ben Munson informed members that the Task Force on Disability Accommodations in the Learning Environment would be presenting its full recommendations to the Faculty Consultative Committee (March 17), and to the full Faculty Senate (March 31) for approval.

3. Resources for Students in Recovery

Next, the committee engaged in a discussion of resources for students in recovery. To frame the discussion, Chair Johnson posed the following questions:

- How can students in long-term recovery gain documentation for accommodations when they face temporary crises?
- Can clinicians at Boynton have a "fast track" process to document students who are at risk and need accommodations?

- How can the Disabilities Issues Committee advocate for a more robust campus recovery community?
- How can the Disabilities Issues Committee advocate for reducing stigma around recovery?

Munson remarked that Augsburg has special dorms for students in recovery and sober living communities for students. He added that stigma about both addiction and recovery are still very big problems.

Donna Johnson said that the DRC does serve students in recovery, but not a large population. She noted that documentation has not been an issue for people who the DRC is serving. Gayle Golden commented that the individuals for whom documentation is not a problem may be those who are either transitioning out of treatment or have co-occurring disorders; students who are in long term recovery may be missing support, she said.

Golden then informed the committee that because the Peer Recovery Navigator was not getting enough referrals, Americorps had made the decision to terminate the position and reassign the individual elsewhere. Members decided to draft a letter to the administration recommending that the University provide funding for a Peer Recovery Navigator position.

4. Letter to Provost about Lessons Learned During the Pandemic

Chair Johnson asked members what they wanted to do about the letter to the provost with recommendations about pandemic-era practices to retain. Members felt that it was best to just send it from the Disabilities Issues Committee rather than asking other committees to sign on. Johnson said he would send around the final draft for approval and then send it to the provost.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office