

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
STUDENT RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Friday, November 15, 2019  
11:30 AM-1:00 PM**

**Trotter Multicultural Center – Large Meeting Room**

**Present:** Gina Cervetti, Royster Harper, Simone Himbeault Taylor, Nida Syed, Helen Look, Jeannie Moody-Novak, Judith Beck, Mariah Fiumara, Olga Virakhovskaya, David Potter, Jill Esau, Katie Van Zanen, Charlie Koopmann, Chitra Subramanian

**Absent:** Amy Chavasse, Harish Ganesh, Cindy Leung, Yaacov Ritov, Jairam Menon, Kyriaki Marti, Evelyn Winter

**Guest(s):**

- Mary Jo Callan, Director - Ginsberg Center
  - Dave Waterhouse, Associate Director - Ginsberg Center
  - Erin Byrnes, Lead for Democratic Engagement - Ginsberg Center
  - Neeraja Aravamundan - Ginsberg Center
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**1. Lunch/Call to Order**

Chair Cervetti called the meeting to order.

**2. Review / Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for October were reviewed. Chair Cervetti called for revisions. None were offered. Minutes were approved.

**3. Debrief of Political Engagement Survey**

Mary Jo Callan started by informing the committee about the question that the staff from the Ginsberg Center posed to President Mark Schlissel regarding how he would talk to faculty and staff about democracy. His response encouraged civic engagement on campus as an essential aspect of a public university curriculum. (The entire response is on slide 2 of the PowerPoint, included).

She then went on to frame the presentation by asking: How to educate students about democracy? How to have the discussions? How to sort out information? How will students, staff and faculty help shape this work?

A short survey was sent to the committee members following our October meeting. Committee members were encouraged to share the survey link with cohorts in their respective colleges and units.

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Dave Waterhouse addressed the results informing the committee that the survey's purpose was intended for a quick way to check the pulse of faculty and staff regarding whether or not they talk to students about voting and other forms of civic engagement.

Chair Cervetti has volunteered to work with Ginsberg to update the survey to make it easier to adapt to other groups.

Upon going over the preliminary findings it was brought up that one of the barriers or challenges that may constrain the respondent from discussing civic engagement with students was that it was difficult to manage differing views. This caused VP Harper to request for clarification asking if this truly was the viewpoint of faculty. It was discussed that some feel that as difficult as it is to manage differing viewpoints, it is equally difficult to manage the same viewpoint in the classroom as about 25% of students consider themselves conservative and 40% identify as liberal. College campus is where many students are trying to figure it out.

Some feel that it doesn't matter what the faculty believes, faculty should allow the discussions of opposing viewpoints. The university should make room for uncomfortable conversations amongst students. Other comments from the committee included that students may enroll in a seminar that has been offered about how to argue that equips students about how to find the ideas and not the opinions when discussing difficult subjects and listening to learn, not listening to win.

IGR and CRLT are resources to assist and teach how to discuss differentiating points of view. Chair Cervetti explained that she recently was at a workshop that discussed a case regarding a discussion that got uncomfortable and fell apart. The questions posed: How could have the instructor better prepared? What could they do differently? Faculty need tools how to help facilitate uncomfortable conversations.

Neeraja Aravamundan invited the committee to log on to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com). This tool allows for polls to be taken and results to be viewed in real time. This tool acknowledges that we all have differences of opinion, but we don't have claim them in public and we can still discuss. Katie V. brought up that in some areas of the country there has been efforts to suppress the vote for student voices.

Neeraja continued to discuss that voting in class and taking a position must be practiced. Not just for politics, the topics can vary. The results of your vote impacts your everyday life. Polls have suggested that talking with students about the need to vote increased registration rates whether or not is was a student or faculty member. Bring students in to talk about voting, if not you are not comfortable.

Neeraja invited the members to consult with her about any of these subjects/issues around difficult conversations or issues, such as:

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- How to recover when issues/discussions get out of hand. The process is what usually falls apart not necessarily the content. How to handle difficult discussions in the moment. Her opinion is that we will never master this.
- Need resources for Graduate student populations. GSIs lead classes that they have not planned. Need support how to discuss some of the topics that are expected to bring up.
- Online resources about various topics
- Trainings around community engagement

**4. Discussion of Tools and Resources for Supporting Civic Engagement and Discussions**

Erin Byrnes shared tools, ideas and resources to assist with discussing civic engagement and voting with students.

- Share your voting plan – if you have a plan to vote, you most likely will. Model the process.
- Vote Tripling – empower students to discuss the topics and get 3 eligible friends registered to vote.

It was asked about language in Visas about election interference and what that means. Erin clarified that international visitors in the U.S. in a Visa cannot volunteer on campaigns, but are free to discuss the elections.

- Syllabus Integration suggestions
  - Language
  - Key dates
  - Timing of exams and paper due dates
  - Provide link for voter registration assistance and elections day reminders

Mary Jo encouraged faculty to reach out for assistance with putting language on their syllabus and to share any resources they are using in the classroom. Sr. AVP Taylor suggested that faculty recommend to other faculty to include democratic engagement language in their syllabus and that Senate Assembly should be asked to promote it.

Other ideas include

- Frame language around democratic engagement so that it is not so focused on voting.
- Have different language and a menu of options for faculty to include in classroom.
- Component on media literacy and fact-checking. Knowing how to seek out information.

Erin thanked the committee on behalf of the Ginsberg staff.

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**5. VP Royster Harper Comments**

Royster's comments as this is her last SRAC meeting before her retirement: She thanked the committee for their work. She encouraged committee members to continue to advocate for students and to teach students what they need. Use their voice and power as faculty and staff to have students fully engaged on campus.

David Potter thanked Royster for her attention to this committee.

**6. Adjournment**

Chitra Subramanian made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mariah Fiumara seconded. All in favor. Meeting Adjourned.