

Government Relations Advisory Committee (GRAC) Minutes

Feb. 11, 2021
12-1:30 p.m. EDT
ZOOM

In attendance:

Marisa Conte, University Library
Elizabeth Devlin, Faculty Senate Office
Justin Hodge, School of Social Work
Erin Kahle, Nursing
Chris Kolb, VP for Government Relations
Andrea Lewis, Government Relations (Staff)
Daniil Manaekov, LSA
Renee Nguyen, ISR
Jacob Pearlman, Michigan Law
Alexandra Rivera, UM Library, Chair
Michael (Mike) Thompson, Michigan Medicine

Absent:

Morgan Beeler, SEAS
Anna Ceballos, General Studies
Kara Charbarneau, Michigan Medicine
Vincent Glud, ITS
John Mansfield, Engineering
Kentaro Toyama, SACUA Liaison

Introductions

Chris introduced himself to the group in his first meeting and provided background information on his work history and experience.

The committee members introduced themselves to VP Kolb.

Budget Update

VP Kolb shared an update on the state budget following the Governor's budget recommendation presented by the State Budget Director.

Overall, the budget is at \$67.1 billion total which is up from last year. A lot of the increase is one-time money. The major priorities are education, infrastructure, public health, clean environment opportunity, all while exercising fiscal responsibility.

For Higher Education, the executive budget is recommending a 2 percent increase – \$30.5 million across all 15 public universities – along with one-time additional funding for universities of \$57.3 million. To

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qualify for the additional funds, universities need to adopt COVID-19 related policies regarding testing, tracing, etc. which U-M already has in place. In sum, this would be a six percent increase for all universities; however, the big issue is that these are all one time funds and would not be used as a base for next year's budget discussions/development.

The budget process is long, beginning in February with the goal of being completed by the beginning of July.

In the context of the budget, VP Kolb mentioned the importance of advocating for the University of Michigan by educating legislators and key decision makers of the University's role as a public research facility and the return on investment they receive. This is an on-going national conversation and the University needs to continue to demonstrate its value to the state.

In response to a question from committee member Manaekov, VP Kolb clarified that the executive budget recommendation does not take potential federal relief dollars into consideration – only existing funding.

Committee member Nguyen had follow-up questions regarding funding across the 15 public universities and the Michigan Reconnect Program. VP Kolb provided some more insight into how the money is allocated and university efforts to support nontraditional students.

Committee member Hodge spoke about how the university and city are balancing keeping everyone safe without locking people completely in place due to the pandemic. Most of the time in city commission meetings has been spent on vaccine distribution, and trying to address challenges due to allocation from the state and short supply.

Committee member Manaekov inquired if there have been any discussions at the university in response to proposals related to canceling out student debt as this may have some interesting market implications. The committee did not have an answer, and committee member Manaekov stated he hoped the university was looking into it.

Chair Rivera asked VP Kolb if there was anything the committee could do to support him. VP Kolb stated the committee was a good conduit as to what is going on on-campus. He stated that the Government Relations office is trying to think strategically on public engagement and identify resources that the university can provide to the state. With a decentralized campus, it's helpful being able to reach out to the committee as a resource and sounding board.

Special projects

Committee member Hodge spoke about a roster of U-M employees who are in elected office or other governmental roles and the possibility of creating a civic engagement program that makes use of the expertise of people at the university. He spoke with the Ginsberg Center and they are very interested in this potential project.

Committee member Nguyen mentioned a virtual event she attended with Turn Up Turn Out on the topic of the death penalty and how an individual can find out information leading up to an election. There will be another event on the topic of student debt forgiveness.

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NEXT MEETING: Thursday, March 4 from 12 - 1:30 p.m.