

**To:** SACUA

**From:** Jessica Pasquale, Chair, Student Relations Advisory Committee (SRAC)

**Subject:** Report on Activities of the Student Relations Advisory Committee for 2023-2024

**Members:** Jonathan Brennan, Marna Clowney-Robinson, Ashley Gearhardt, Cindee Giffen, Bruno Giordani, Anouck Girard, Marita Rohr Inglehart, Charlie Koopmann, Laura MacLatchy, Jamie Niehof, Jessica Pasquale, David Potter, Joel Scheuher, David Mikkola (student)

**SACUA Liaison:** Simon Cushing

**Meeting Dates:** Monthly on Fridays from 11:30 am - 1:00 pm (9/15, 10/20, 11/17, 12/15, 1/19, 2/16, 3/15, and 4/19). Meeting locations changed throughout the year so committee members could see student-center spaces around in person. If no location is listed specifically, the meeting took place in Ruthven.

### **Committee Charge**

The Student Relations Advisory Committee (SRAC) advises and consults with Dr. Martino Harmon, Vice President of Student Life, concerning topics of interest at the intersection of faculty and student concerns.

### **Specific Areas of Interest for 2023-2024:**

1. Investigate existing initiatives across campus that offer opportunities for faculty to engage with students outside the classroom and develop recommendations for increasing faculty participation in such initiatives.
2. Solicit feedback on the perception of a "healthy campus social climate" from students and units, programs, and offices already working in this area, and develop recommendations to improve cross-campus coordination and collaboration to increase faculty members' awareness and participation in existing and new initiatives.
3. Receive and review feedback about the accommodation process that the Faculty Senate Office will be soliciting from the Faculty Senate membership. Consolidate that feedback to share with the leadership of Student Accessibility and Accommodations Services (SAAS) and the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. Meet with SAAS and SSD leadership to discuss specific faculty concerns, and then report back to SACUA any relevant information obtained or recommendations developed.
4. Consider emergent issues or topics brought forward by SRAC committee members or the Vice President for Student Life for discussion over the course of the year. While coordinating with the Faculty Senate Office to help avoid duplicating work that SACUA has now referred to itself or to another committee, the committee may also continue discussing any issues or topics raised in the committee's most recent annual committee report.

### **Committee Actions**

In the first meeting of the year on September 15, 2023, the committee met in the Ginsburg Center to review the specific charge for the year and discuss other possible topics for future meetings in the 2023-24 academic year. In addition, Dr. Martino Harmon, VP for Student Life, shared information about the strategic plan for his department for the coming year as well as the general outcome of Welcome Week events.

The October meeting took place at the Trotter Multicultural Center and the Committee heard from Allen Sheffield, the Associate Director of Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services, about Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), Academic Support Programming (ASP), and the Testing Accommodation Center (TAC). SAAS Director Oluwaferanmi Okanlami was also in attendance virtually and answered some questions from the committee.

In November, the meeting took place in a private room at the South Quad Dining Hall. Rick Gibson, Director of University Housing and Steve Giardini, Director of Michigan Dining, shared information about Living Learning Communities and Retail, Catering, and Residential Dining services on campus, with special attention to these areas within the South Fifth (Central Campus) Residential project.

The December meeting was held in the Michigan Union where Kelly Dunlop, Associate Director of the Center for Campus Involvement, and Susan Pile, Senior Director of University Unions and Auxiliary Services shared with the Committee multiple one-time and ongoing opportunities for faculty to interact with students outside the classroom. Feedback from the Senate Assembly breakout discussions on student accommodations was also shared and discussed by the committee.

In January, the meeting took place at the Student Activities Building and Mike Widen, Director of Recreational Sports, shared construction updates and information about the new Central Campus Recreational Building (CCRB). Steve Bodei and Mary Schlitt, both Associate Directors of the Barger Leadership Institute, shared information about their office and the centralization and coordination of leadership opportunities for students across campus.

The February meeting took place in a conference room of the Program on Intergroup Relations office on South University and multiple guests shared updates and responses to increased polarization on campus, including Neeraja Aravamudan, Director of the Ginsberg Center, Monita Thompson, Co-Director of the Program on Intergroup Relations, Nadia Bazy, Director of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs (MESA), Kya Shahid, Director of the Trotter Multicultural Center, and Erik Wessel and Mike Ryan, Director and Associate Director (respectively) of the Office of Student Conflict Resolution.

In March the meeting took place in a private dining room in the Mosher-Jordan dormitory cafeteria. The committee was joined by Central Student Government (CSG) President Meera Herle, and CSG Vice President Bipasha Ray, and they shared student perceptions of the campus climate amid the Israel/Palestine conflict as well as general reactions to the draft of the “Principles on Diversity of Thought and Freedom of Expression.”

The last meeting of the year occurred in April and focused on student success initiatives between Wolverine Wellness and the Center for Research on Learning & Teaching (CRLT), shared by Mary Jo Desprez, Director of Wolverine Wellness, Joy Pehlke, Assistant Director of Wolverine Wellness, Janet Jansen, Health Promotion Specialist from LSA, and Deborah Lichti, Instructional Consultant from CRLT. Question for you: I remember the person discussing bereavement leave policies and his female colleague on zoom. Should we mention that?

### **Information Obtained**

Faculty members of the Committee and others already aware of such opportunities can help spread the word and volunteer to assist students during new student move-in and welcome week, as well as informing the group about opportunities for students to “Take your Professor to Lunch.”

2022 Biennial AHEAD Survey information obtained from the Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services Office in the October meeting shows that U-M is an outlier when it comes to our full time staff to student ratio regarding handling accommodations, having the highest ratio by far (749:1). Since 2022, the number of accommodations and number of students have drastically increased, placing an incredible strain on the staff, students, and faculty who are involved in the accommodation process. Feedback from Senate Assembly breakout groups from the October SA meeting show that accommodations are handled in a variety of ways across campuses, schools, and units. The increase in types of accommodations and process changes have increased the administrative burden of faculty and coordinators who have to manage accommodations, especially for large classes. The current model is not sustainable and additional funding and staffing support, as well as better documentation and training resources are needed in this area.

An underlying theme of many discussions related to perceptions of campus climate centered on the feelings of discomfort vs. safety. It seems we as an institution need to better inform students and the general public that parts of the learning process can be discomforting, but that it is often a necessary roadblock on the path to growth and discovery.

One additional discussion centered around clarifying policies related to bereavement accommodations for students and accommodations in situation with critical life events. Clarifying the objectives of such accommodations and information about the concrete policies different academic units currently rely on could be helpful for faculty members and students alike.

### **Recommendations**

1. Significantly more resources need to be directed to Student Accessibility and Accommodations Services. As noted above, the current funding and staffing model is not sustainable; resources should be increased as enrollment continues to increase. There is a need for a comprehensive review of the current and past practices for granting accommodations. Given the apparent rapidly increasing numbers and types of accommodations that have been appearing, a review of common practices across similar institutions should be considered for discussion.

2. Efforts should be made to encourage faculty interactions with students outside the classroom, as these are some of the more memorable and influential interactions students have with faculty. A possible method to incentivize this in a way that does not add to already busy faculty and student schedules would be to consider faculty participation in student-centered, University-sponsored events and programs (i.e. “Welcome to Michigan” events for first year and transfer students) as meeting the “criteria” of “service to the University” present in most annual Faculty Activity Reports and Evaluations. If nothing else, calls for volunteers from Student Life offices who organize such events should be reaching faculty *directly* as opposed to going to department chairs or other points of contact with schools / colleges / units and expecting them to forward or share it with all faculty.
3. Assistance and informational services for students are often overlooked or unknown by faculty and/or students. One could assume that a resource exists on campus for almost anything a student could need, but connecting them with those resources can be difficult due to a variety of factors, such as the ‘location’ of the service within a specific unit / program / office, as well as how widely and with whom targeted outreach efforts are made. Efforts should be focused on either improving the Wolverine Life app or creating a new centralized mobile-friendly ‘hub’ to help connect campus community members with specific resources. For example, a student should be able to open an app and choose “I’m bored” from a list of possible “mood” menu options. From here, a list of events happening across campus within the next 24-28 hours is displayed and can be filtered by a variety of options (location, duration, target audience, etc.). This would require much more coordination across the various units and programs on campus, but would be well worth the effort and might actually reduce duplication of effort and lead to more creative partnerships. In addition, increased attention is needed to provide local mental health resources to avoid placing students in locations far away from Ann Arbor or even in other states.
4. While the Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities will likely take up a majority of time next year, this committee should continue to focus on learning more about how student-faculty interactions outside the classroom can be encouraged and strengthened, as well as advocating for additional resources for heavily-utilized student services, especially as enrollment numbers continue to increase.
5. The inaugural Vice President for Undergraduate Education, Angela Dillard, should be invited to one or more committee meetings next year to assure positive collaborations between this new Vice President and the Student Affairs Department. Alternatively, if a new senate assembly committee will be formed to advise VP Dillard, as SRAC advises VP Harmon, efforts should be made to coordinate topics and speakers between the two committees to prevent duplication.