Your Student Senate: Ready to Listen to Views and Improve Student Life

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The Trio Student Union anxiously awaited the Student Senate’s decision. Last year, Trio held a successful Valleyfair event. They hoped to host a ValleySCARE event this year. Trio, with support from the Muslim Student Organization and the Soccer Club, made their case for this event. They came prepared with handouts and facts. The Student Senate examined their proposal and its numbers with critical deliberation. They assessed the thoughtfulness of the group’s ideas and considered possible revisions and improvements. After much discussion, the Student Senate endorsed the event.

The Student Senate has meetings throughout the year. They listen to student organizations and college officials. Student senators discuss new ideas on how to improve the experience of students attending Metropolitan State University. They continue to examine several possibilities including a Dean’s list, on-campus child care, upgrading the LGBTQ Resource Center, a mascot for Metro State, and an on-campus bicycle-share system. This month, college officials asked the Student Senate for their input on the latest MnSCU (Minnesota State Colleges & Universities) report.

Last June, MnSCU (recently renamed as ‘Minnesota State’) published its *Report of the Workgroup on Long-Term Financial Sustainability*. In this report, the workgroup predicts a “shortfall in the range of $66 million to $475 million.” They also proclaim that MnSCU’s current financial operating practices will “become unsustainable by 2025.” The report claims that increased costs, declining state funding, decreased student enrollment and tuition freezes, contribute to the challenges of achieving “financial sustainability.” The report also asserts that annual budget cuts are “not a viable long-term solution” and finding new revenue sources “will not fill the system’s deepening fiscal hole.”

The workgroup announced several recommendations in their report that could help MnSCU prevent a future budgetary crisis. The proposed changes would significantly modify the MnSCU system. “To reduce costs and improve results, the system must re-organize.” First, the workgroup believes that MnSCU should “act as an enterprise.” They would like to improve academic planning with “streamlined curriculum, guided transfer pathways, competency-based credential and degree pathways, online offerings and customized training.” These innovations could help students reduce the time and money they use to obtain a degree. These strategies could also help MnSCU retain more students and reduce the costs of excessive classes.

The workgroup also suggests in their report “partnerships that prepare students for a successful college and university experience.” According to their data, “approximately two-thirds of the system’s transfer-minded students who start on the road to a baccalaureate degree at a metropolitan-area college do not enroll in any college or university within four years of leaving.” This information means that many students intend to complete a four-year degree, but they eventually abandon their studies. The proposed partnerships could help students (including high school students) gain a clear direction early in their college careers. The assistance could increase the likelihood that students complete a four-year degree program. These partnerships could increase the number of students that finish their baccalaureate degree at a MnSCU university or college.

Besides these measures, the workgroup would like to “consolidate the delivery of core functions.” Core functions include admissions, financial aid and human resources. Instead of allocating these duties to each college or university in the system, MnSCU could set up “regional and statewide call centers” to process student needs. The workgroup advises MnSCU to “adopt more creative and flexible labor practices” to reduce personnel costs and fulfill student needs for instruction at multiple campuses. The workgroup also suggests that MnSCU “re-calibrates physical plant and space capacity.” MnSCU could review their facilities plans to decrease overbuilding and utilizing available space to “reduce operating costs and increase revenue.”

As this report and recommendations are making their way through the MnSCU system, the workgroup is meeting opposition from the Inter Faculty Organization (ifo.org). The IFO is a union that represents the faculty of the MnSCU system. They believe that the proposed changes are “severely limiting student access and opportunities through limiting courses, closing programs and potentially closing campuses.” If this occurs, students will have less academic freedom to explore various college programs and subjects. Student class choices will be more limited and restricted to fewer options. The IFO also claims, on their website, that the recommendations “do not address the out-of-control growth of administration.” They also warn these changes could lead to “undermining pay, job stability and working conditions for all faculty and staff.” The IFO has a petition to oppose the workgroup’s long-term financial sustainability recommendations.

The Student Senate of Metropolitan State University recognizes the urgent need for a stance on these recommendations. The Student Senate recently discussed the viewpoints of the MnSCU workgroup and the IFO. To investigate their proposals further, the Student Senate voted to create an ad hoc committee. They want to work with students on this matter.

Student senators actively seek input from students. They listen to student viewpoints and find ways to progress student life. It is a commitment they take seriously. They want students to know that they are available to discuss their concerns and voice their opinions. They are eager to hear from you about the Long-Term Financial Sustainability issue or any other concerns.

The Student Senate meets twice a month in Room 201 of the Student Center on the Saint Paul Campus. They meet on designated Friday evenings from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Please reference their website (orgsync.com/43143/chapter) for upcoming events and more details. Besides discussing ideas and issues, the Student Senate has initiated many programs and activities including the ‘Shoe Away Hunger’ shoe drive in October to help Good in the Hood. They also held a recent ‘Financial Literacy Forum’ to help students understand financial aid, loans and scholarships.

The Student Senate is currently busy preparing students for the upcoming election Tuesday, Nov. 8. Throughout October and early November, the Student Senate has hosted several Metro State VOTES events. Their goal is to have 75 percent of Metro students registered and voting on Election Day. Student Senate President, Dhibo Hussein, told her fellow senators, “Get students involved and pumped up!”