



USM Student Council Report for the USM Board of Regents

September 14, 2020

The USM Student Council Executive Board has met summer goals to have both a breadth and depth of representation across the University System of Maryland. This term we have two voting reps for each of our 13 active institutions. We have seen the positive impacts of outreach efforts which have been primarily on virtual platforms as we received around 50 nominations for our Director Roles and 19 nominations for our one VP vacancy. We are equally delighted to see this heightened knowledge about the USMSC alongside concrete demonstrations of students seeking ways to be actively engaged in public service. The leadership team has a “listening first” servant leadership philosophy and makes it a priority to meet with individual members of the council and offer to join student government meetings throughout the term. Thus far these meetings have included six institutions and the goal is to have all institutions virtually met with or visited before the next official meeting in October.

We have convened two Special Meetings of the USMSC in addition to our first official meeting of the term on Sunday, September 13th. The first special meeting took place on August 16th and was primarily geared towards orienting all members of the council to our shared role in shared governance as well as a robust discussion on one of the USMSC’s top priorities to promote education and outreach towards student civic engagement and voting. We were very fortunate to have Dr. Nancy Shapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor, present on USM efforts related to civic education and engagement and the NSLVE assessment findings and plans for this year. Since this meeting several members of USMSC have joined to serve on the USM Civic Engagement Student Leadership Committee to share and coordinate across the USM. This group had its first meeting on Friday, September 11th.

The second Special USMSC meeting was convened on September 8th and welcomed Vice Chancellor Leonard Raley and Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief of Staff Marianne Horrigan to discuss and solicit student feedback on the proposed amendments to the USM Naming Policy. Students were by and large favorable and grateful to see the proposed policy changes and expressed hopes that timelines will be given to better guide the implementation of the new policy. In addition, students hope similar requests for their collective feedback and feedback from their constituents will be sought in the future.

Our official September meeting included a substantial amount of time for graduate and undergraduate student conversations surrounding the top four priorities identified by USMSC members. These topics had some overlap and included COVID-19 related issues of concern, sharing best practices and student government efforts related to diversity, equity and inclusion, continued efforts to promote civic education and engagement this fall and the continued concern of student mental health, which has been a recurring top issue for USMSC for years but one that is unfortunately amplified by the precarity of individual and familial situations during the pandemic.

Of note, the USMSC as a whole expressed an appreciation of all the tremendous work being done day in and day out by leaders at the institutional and system level as well as by faculty, staff and fellow students during this time. Many students expressed a desire to



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work with the appropriate groups and individuals to more holistically approach expectations of students to incorporate the added challenges that continue during COVID-19. Examples would be less rigid expectations that are dependent upon one's access to technology to engage with virtual learning, considerations for many students, who, like faculty and staff, may now be absorbing care-giving responsibilities for loved ones, the overall anxiety produced by current events (pandemic, structural racism, natural disasters) and the need for communications, resources and flexibility related to grief and bereavement needs. Additionally, there were COVID-19 concerns related to financial strain and students seeking the reduction of student fees for services that will not be used during this semester and a concern of housing decisions and not knowing the plans for the Spring 2021 semester.

Many student governments have identified their top efforts to be related to addressing structural racism and additional initiatives to improve diversity, equity and inclusion across various populations including disability. Student government leaders are interested in better understanding the bigger DEI picture across the system and we are working to help provide reports to all of the student leaders. The discussions surrounding COVID-19 and DEI had significant overlap with concerns for mental health. We discussed how students may learn about resources and best spread the word about them to their constituents, an acknowledgement that tele-counseling is a wanted option, but not one feasible for everyone given a wide variety of possible limitations caused by lack of private space and not being available during the times when most services are offered and/or stable Internet connectivity.

With Respect and Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annie Rappeport".

Annie Rappeport
2020-2021 USMSC President