



Student Senate

Third Quarter Report of the 2020-2021 Academic Year

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff of Valparaiso University:

One of the constitutional duties of the Student Body Vice President of Valparaiso University is to have the Student Senators of the Student Senate draft and submit constituency reports each quarter of the academic year. This not only serves as a meaningful line of communication between Student Senators and their constituents, but it also serves as a way for the greater campus community to know the concerns of the Student Body. This report compiles the reports from the Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Transfer, College of Arts & Sciences, Christ College, College of Engineering, College of Nursing and Health Professions, Commuter constituencies, and the Campus At-Large constituencies. **The College of Business seat was vacant at the time of submission, but will be present in the next quarterly report. In these reports, there were specific issues to each constituency, but I will be addressing the common themes.

Students were happy to see the university initiating a COVID-19 testing plan for individuals on campus. There were an understandable amount of positive results given the amount of students tested, yet the University and its faculties were unprepared to handle the ramifications of a surge of cases. Constituents have complained that during the first week of testing, the lack of staffing in the VU Health Center led to the university becoming overwhelmed with the number of cases on campus. This led to confusion among those who tested positive or were in contact with someone who tested positive, as they weren't sure if they should self-isolate or go home to isolate. The fact that quarantine housing on campus was at zero percent capacity at the time of the results was disappointing, as it was logical to anticipate an influx of cases given the extent of tests administered. Many feel uncomfortable with the fact that potentially COVID-positive students were continuing to reside on residential floors with healthy students, sharing facilities like showers and stalls in extremely close proximity with other residents.

There has been some concern over the continuation of in person tours when everything was moved online. When students are forced to have their classes online, they are confused and upset when they see people who do not attend Valpo on campus. Many students are not comfortable with off-campus individuals visiting their residence halls while they are in the building. Before the university went completely online, professors were insisting that students must come in-person to classes and not use the optional Zoom link for classes unless they have COVID related illness or issues. This made commuter and other students very uncomfortable and upset, as they believe they should have the option to use the provided Zoom link at any time, as it is

safer and more convenient. In response to these concerns, Student Senate passed [SR001-SP21](#). This resolution for wider zoom access and class recordings passed 19-1-1. In the SR, Student Senate called for the University to allow students to attend Zoom classes synchronously for commuter students facing difficulties attending class due to extreme weather circumstances, students traveling on behalf of the university who must attend class remotely, students with illnesses unrelated to COVID-19 (that are acute enough to not require AARC accommodations) that still wish to participate and attend class remotely, and students with emergencies that are outside of their control.

Some students have expressed concerns regarding meal plans and the cost that comes with that. COVID has kept many students from dining in a normal setting. Some students are using their plans less frequently, or are using them in a different capacity, ie. going to the cafe (grab and go option). This has raised the question as to why students are having to stick with their current plan or pay the regular price when it is not a regular year. The Dining Services Committee is looking into this issue and plans to have other options available to students in the early summer. Parkhurst administration, university administration, and the dining committee have been discussing the best possible options for students. We understand that this year has been far from normal, but we plan to have new policies in place that will best serve the students for next school year.

Students both within and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community have voiced concerns with YAF's application for recognition by the Student Senate. A petition to keep this group off-campus received over 2,000 signatures. The national YAF organization has a troubling track record of homophobic, transphobic, classist, ableist, and racist statements. They have encouraged policies that discriminate against these groups, and as a result many who identify as LGBTQ+ or fall within other minority groups feel threatened by their presence on campus. Student Senate will continue to monitor the situation through the organization recognition process.

Student Senate has passed a number of bylaw proposals and constitutional amendments so far this semester. [BP001-SP21](#) calls for per diem system installation and passed 21-0-0. This addresses the lack of current guidelines regarding reimbursable expenses as it pertains to organizations' conferences events and other trips. [SR002-SP21](#) is a resolution calling for the addition of pronoun options on DataVU. Currently, there is no option on DataVU to submit a student's pronouns. Student Senate urges the university to include a student's pronouns in the "My Profile" section in DataVU and to require professors to have knowledge of and utilize their students' correct pronouns. This passed 19-1-1. Student Senate also passed [SR003-SP21](#) 21-0-0. This resolution thanks Colette Irwin-Knott for her Service to the University and wishes her all the best with our sincerest gratitude.

Senate recently passed [BP003-SP21](#), a proposal calling for Student Senate reapportionment, and [CA002-SP 21](#), a constitutional amendment calling for a change in Student Senate requirements. Under these new policies, all Student Senators must have maintained a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or above and be full time undergraduate students. In addition, all Student Senators, with the exception of first-year and transfer seats, must also have completed at least twelve credit hours at Valparaiso University. Each college will receive a Senate seat, rounding to the nearest whole number, for every 400 students enrolled in said college. This will take effect during the Fall 2021 semester and to be used in the April 2021 election cycle. We also encourage the authorities addressed in [SR002-FA20](#) to publicly respond to the resolution calling for university support of international students. The Career Center has made some changes, which we appreciate, and we hope it will help other students.

As was addressed last semester, students continue to feel stressed and burnt out. Many have cited the fatigue of online classes, compressed schedule, and noticeable lack of a longer spring break to look forward to as contributions to this sense of burnout. We continue to ask for support from faculty and staff, and ask them to continue to be empathetic in these extremely trying times by stepping into our shoes and seeing this semester from our perspectives. In a semester where students are collectively struggling, please consider giving additional accommodations.

This report is a general overview of student experiences on campus. I am happy and willing to share more college specific, or class specific, information and concerns if desired by an individual. Student Senate is made up of four senators representing each class, two senators representing transfer students, two senators representing commuter students, two senators representing the student body at-large, and a senator representing each college on campus. These senators specialize in the concerns and issues facing their constituencies and would be happy and willing to speak to any student, faculty, or staff member wanting to know more about student experiences and concerns on campus. Student Senate's mission is to actively speak out for student interests and concerns, and this report serves as a pinnacle of this mission to make student concerns more available and present. Senate will continue to meet on Zoom on Monday's at 8:30 p.m. We encourage you to join our Youtube livestream, where you can observe our meetings and make your voice heard. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at senate.vp@valpo.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jolie Foor".

Jolie Foor
Student Body Vice President