



Student Senate

First Quarter Report of the 2020-2021 Academic Year

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, College of Business, Christ College, College of Engineering, College of Nursing and Health Professions, and the Campus At-Large constituencies. **Commuter seats were 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. Most concerns that students have currently stem from effects of COVID-19. First, students are frustrated with the current COVID-19 dashboard and its lack of transparency of certain data points, as well as its poor layout and graphics. On Monday, October 19, Student Senate unanimously passed SR001-FA20 that addresses the student concerns of the dashboard, accompanied with the petition to update the dashboard with more information that was signed by over 500 students. Student Senate will now have discussion with President's Council on how to best facilitate the roll-out of a new, transparent dashboard that will hopefully settle the frustrations students have. Additionally, students are having trouble understanding and practicing the changing mask policies within the residence halls, which then bleeds to other areas of campus. This confusion is being felt in all constituencies. Students are unsure of what mask practices they should be doing in their own residence halls as well as the halls they are visiting, and this confusion is being followed to other buildings on campus, such as the Harre Union and CCLIR. Another commonality in the reports is that some students are seeing a trend with RA's "going out of their way" to report students for not wearing masks while they are alone in lounges in their own building, which seems to stem back to the confusion about the change in policy. Even with this confusion, students are empathetic of the increased duties that RA's have in regards to enforcing COVID-19 policies in addition to permanent residential hall policy. Students feel that this policy may also be too lax and would prefer the University keep the original mask policy as to keep cases to minimum while on campus.

Some other issues that have resulted from COVID-19 are more socially and individually-driven. Students have brought up their frustration with COVID-19 guidelines inhibiting their ability to

develop relationships with other students and their professors by limiting in-person classes or communications with their professors, limiting or cancelling campus events where students would normally make friends, or limiting normal interactions with other peers by the enforcement of COVID-19 policies. The lack of these events and in-person classes has been leading to a feeling of disconnection to campus. Additionally, students feel that they are not getting much from their classes, especially online courses. Students are also experiencing burn out and an increase in stress, anxiety and other mental health issues with the lack of a fall break this semester. This issue is being felt by every constituency on campus, and students fear that this concern will return in the spring semester. Students are finding difficulty in getting a hold of the Counseling Center for these issues, and that professors are not valuing student's concerns about their mental health when it comes to workload of assignments.

Another common theme is the overall disappointment with Dining Services, specifically the lack of diversity in the food selection and the quality of the food served in Founders. Earlier in the semester when students were beginning to be quarantined, the food being served to students was subpar, but Student Senate addressed this issue to Dining Services and the matter was quickly resolved. Most recently, students are still finding issues with a lack of variety in ethnic foods, vegan and vegetarian options, and the selection of food being served. Athletes have also voiced concerns that serving sizes and the selection of food have been inadequate. Student Senate has recently passed a Bylaw Proposal over the summer that has added a standing Dining Services Committee that meets biweekly with Parkhurst Dining representatives to address these concerns quickly. On a more positive note, Engineering students are excited to now have a dining location that is much more accessible to them given the amount of time they spend in or near Gellerson during the day.

Senators have reported that students of color do not feel that their voices are being heard adequately and that they do not take solace from the emails being sent about future plans for the University. Some recent concerns are the willingness to take action and show support for students of color on campus as well as taking stricter and more consequential action on people in the campus community that commit acts of racism or discrimination. On Thursday, October 8, Student Senate cosponsored a town hall with the Black Student Organization (BSO) as an opportunity for students of color to ask administrators important questions about their position in the campus community, what actions will be taken by the University to better support students of color, and how will their safety on campus be a priority. With the recent events in Wehrenberg Hall, students want to know what action will be taken on the students that have committed this hate crime. Additionally, international students are still hurting from a lack of response from the University over the summer when their ability to remain in the United States was threatened by the Federal government. A coalition of Senators will be writing an SR in response to this.

Lastly, students have expressed concerns relating to general withholding of information and not being as transparent as the University could be. One example of this withholding of information that students expressed is the furloughing and/or letting go of faculty and staff members without much reasoning behind these decisions besides COVID-19. They are also concerned about the discontinuance of certain programs such as Social Work, Education, Theatre and some World Languages. Social Work students have been heavily campaigning on campus to save their program. Students would like to be more informed on the reasoning behind these decisions on campus and for the University to be more transparent in future decisions that heavily impact students and the campus community.

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.

Sincerely,



Ben Jacobs
Student Body Vice President