

External Affairs Committee End of Year Report 2021

Submitted by Kiren MacLeod: 2020-2021 Committee Chair

Members:

Hildana Assefa (Associate Senator)

Dan Fox (Associate Senator)

Mike Owsley (Voting Senator)

Morgan Sprehe (Voting Senator)

PJ Wuennenberg (Voting Senator)

Projects

Changing Precinct Lines:

The work here began by meeting with Adair County Clerk Sandra Collop. I scheduled this meeting in advance through her email, which can be found online. She responded quickly and we were able to arrange a meeting, which went well. I told her of my belief that the Truman State precinct should include several surrounding streets composed largely of student housing. She agreed with me, and requested that we meet again later, after the 2020 election, which was taking a large amount of her time. I attempted to arrange this meeting multiple times, as did my committee member Mike Owsley, yet we never received a response. In our meeting, she did note that she'd like to see some sort of method to identify areas where students live. I believe some sort of survey or general approximate map could identify these areas for the Clerk. I assume our subsequent emails were simply lost in the shuffle and do not doubt her commitment to this cause, and advise any future committee chair who's passionate about the issue to reach out to her further.

Mask Mandate Lobbying:

We started this process first by attempting to figure out who exactly had responsibility for creating a mask mandate. Given that City Council had passed COVID-related resolutions, primarily in April 2020, we figured a meeting with city officials would be best. Myself, President Katie Alexander, and Vice President Josh German ended up sitting down with several city officials, including Mayor Zac Burden, Councilwoman Jessica Parks, City Manager Mari Macomber, and the now-late Police Chief Steve Farnsworth. They received us well and the meeting was non-confrontational and polite, though the city officials were (somewhat understandably) vague on committing to any particular policies. They referred us towards the Adair County Health Department's Board of Trustees, who Health, Wellness, and Safety Committee Co-Chair Adam Barker and I later sat down with. They were receptive to the idea of a mask mandate, though did not commit any particular way and had some valid concerns with the policy. However, after both of these meetings, the Board recommended a mask mandate, and the city adopted it unanimously.

Business COVID-Safe Practices Certification:

We didn't end up doing a ton here, but I did help run point between us and City Hall on this. I deferred largely to Health, Wellness, and Safety in terms of crafting specific standards but did sit down on most all of the meetings we had over this (such as our one with the Chamber of

Commerce) and helped obtain a large list of businesses that we ended up reaching out to, via the Adair County Health Department, with an employee who had a list of businesses within the county.

Newsletter:

Mike Owsley ended up writing this and did a great job on it. He crowdsourced most of the information in it from committee chairs themselves. It's sent along to Alec and then we're gonna make sure it's sent to our alumni network before the end of the semester. It's a shame we never got to doing one of these for each semester and I take responsibility for that, but I'm proud of what we have and know now that this can be a pretty quick and painless job if you get most of your info straight from the chair of each spotlighted committee.

Events

Voter Registration, Ballot Notarization, and Absentee Ballot Requests:

I. Becoming Notaries:

A. Morgan Sprehe and Mike Owsley became commissioned public notaries outside of the agenda of External to help notarize absentee ballots for the 2020 elections. There were some unforeseen circumstances that occurred due to the delay in mail service and Mike was only able to notarize a handful of people's ballots and Morgan did not receive her stamp until February. However they now have everything they need to notarize ballots for the 2022 elections and we recommend at least one person on External being a commissioned public notary at all times. It costs about \$100 total to become a notary, with the license costing \$25 and other necessary materials costing ~\$80. This should ideally be someone registered to vote in Kirksville, as it'll make there be a whole lot less headache in the process of becoming notarized.

II. Voter Registration and Ballot Requests:

A. We ended up pairing up with Greek Life for a lot of this as a way to increase our engagement with them and to not have multiple organizations doing separate events for the same cause. This really helped, because it meant we had a much bigger pool of people to draw from in keeping tables staffed, and Student Government was able to maintain a very consistent presence. The table was also almost always busy and people certainly had questions about the process of registering to vote and requesting a ballot, so having people knowledgeable about the process helps. We did our tabling at the Sandra K. Giachino Reavy Sesquicentennial Plaza, which I feel is an ideal location. For the future, the Committee may want to take the lead on organizing this, but I like the involvement we have with other organizations in planning and executing this event.

RESOLUTIONS

A Resolution Encouraging the Suspension of Student Obligations on Election Day:

We passed this unanimously in the first semester. It was an entire process to get to knowing how we wanted to attack this issue, as we were cautioned that Faculty Senate and UGC would be unlikely to pass a measure if we submitted it, and there were ultimately concerns over if having election day off would give us enough days in the semester to maintain our accreditation with the state. As such, we encouraged professors to simply cancel their own classes via this resolution, which passed unanimously and inspired a number of professors to indeed cancel their classes. This is still a process and I hope future committee chairs are able to work with the Board of Governors to enshrine this in our schedule. Student Affairs also helped co-sponsor this resolution.

A Resolution Calling on the City of Kirksville to Adopt a Face Mask Mandate:

This resolution was also passed unanimously in the first semester and made clear our belief that the city of Kirksville's lack of mask mandate was indeed abetting the spread of COVID-19. We passed this resolution shortly before the Adair County Health Department ended up recommending a mask mandate to City Council, who passed it unanimously.

A Resolution Calling on the State Government to Categorize University Staff as Critical Infrastructure Workers for Vaccine Distribution Purposes:

This resolution passed with very minor opposition during the second semester. It called for all university staff to be classified as critical infrastructure workers, a higher tier than they were in for vaccination purposes. They had initially been in this tier but were suddenly reclassified by the Missouri Department of Health for no stated reason. After we passed this resolution, the University of Missouri-Columbia passed a similar one in response, but as far as we know no other schools did. Ultimately, the state did not take action, but we did reach out to our representatives through PJ Wuennenberg.

A Resolution Calling on the City of Kirksville to Maintain the Face Mask Mandate Until Achieving Widespread Vaccination:

This resolution was not truly done by the External Affairs Committee, but I did help draft it in conjunction with several other key members of the body. This was passed in response to the Health Department expressing interest in potentially repealing the mask mandate, which they ultimately chose to do over a week after the passage of this resolution. In hindsight, I wish we had engaged more with the department's Board to more directly lobby for the mandate's repeal to happen later in the year, as the mask mandate will no longer be in effect beginning May 1.

General Advice

Communication Between the City of Kirksville and Student Government:

I would like to put this together in a separate document outside of my report as well, but there are a number of avenues through which members of Student Government and the City of Kirksville can interact. Assistant City Manager Ashley Young is a good resource, as he is interested in improving Kirksville-Truman relations and, despite being as busy as his title would suggest, is easy to communicate with and willing to hear out ideas. He understands the role of the External Affairs Committee Chair and knows the importance they have in representing the Truman community and Student Government. He can be reached through ayoung@kirksvillecity.com. He deals a lot with specific community development projects and events, and can be communicated with as such.

There are a number of other key officials who can be reached as well. I have personally met three of the four current members of the City Council: Zac Burden, Jessica Parks, and John Gardner. I know for a fact the first two will be willing to sit down with Student Government members to discuss policy and are happy to provide necessary information for steps that can be taken both within and outside of the City Council. Both are attentive listeners and legitimately interested in helping as resource providers. Meanwhile, John Gardner, while newly sworn in, is someone I've met and my dealings with him have seen him respond to correspondence quickly, and I don't doubt his commitment to helping the city.

City Manager Mari Macomber could also be a potential resource, and my one meeting with her saw her generally lead discussion. She is, as all these people are, incredibly busy, but she's willing to be helpful. After our meeting she sent follow-up emails with information she didn't have during our discussion relatively promptly.

In terms of county officials, the Adair County Health Department's Board of Trustees holds open meetings and can be communicated with easily if you attend. They hear you out and ask questions attentively. If you have any health-related issue you'd like to work with the business community on, one employee (currently Stewart Blessing) has a list of all of the businesses within the city and will be happy to forward along any messages you have. County Clerk Sandi Collop is also a good resource for election-related issues. Her office is very busy and things get lost, so follow through very quickly if an email goes unresponded to for even just a few days. She's still willing to sit down with you and is open-minded and helpful.

General Notes

Mental Health:

I don't pretend to be an expert on mental health, but I do know that keeping on top of it in this job can be difficult. You'll be dealing with a lot of people and not all of them will want to play ball on everything you want to work on, and it's easy to internalize that sort of stuff or just get generally frustrated over it. Remember that you'll almost always be dealing with a complex bureaucracy and that any attempts at a change in policy you make are your committee going against an entire system, and that a failure to produce change is not a failure. The stress of many of these tasks you'll have to do will probably get to you, and that there's no shame in asking for help, and don't let this job consume your workload.

Managing Workload:

Start projects sooner than you need to and always be willing to delegate. Your committee will be full of good people who are ready, able, and even hoping to work hard. The specific job of chair attracts people who want to get their work done themselves, but always trust your committee members to do work at least as competently as you can and try to empower them both by encouraging them to pursue their projects and finding the resources they need. If there's one thing I think I did a subpar job at, it's giving my committee members the push they need to jump into their own projects. I always felt I gave them agency, but it can be aimless being a committee member, and I felt as if it would be overbearing to try and force people into finding their passion project and less likely to give them something they really care about. I was wrong and should've been more helpful in providing people with the direction they needed. Also, on delegation: feel free to ask if anyone on the committee wants to do any of your work — delegation both lessens your own severe workload and gives a fulfilling task to members who want to hone and develop their skills. It can be hard to ask someone to do something, but there's no shame in it. Your committee will know that you're working hard.

Relationship With Committee Members:

Maintain them! Ask people how they're doing, check in if they've been inattentive, and always try and help them find their passions. Don't try and force them into having one or they'll feel as if they have to pick a project and it'll be one they feel little about. Don't worry about meetings being unproductive if you just start talking about random things: it's never unproductive to form deeper relationships. Granted, you should try and get work done at your meetings, but if you make meetings fun, your committee will be all the more involved for the important things you discuss at them. Also, try and stimulate discussion, but don't inject your own opinion into debate and discussion until people run out of things to say.

Lobbying People:

Be aggressive and firm, but polite. Show gratitude and understand the complaints or reservations of the people you engage with. If they feel heard and understood, they'll be all the more willing to work with you if you make sure to keep pressing to make progress. You have to be willing to treat people

like people if you want anything to get done. There's also no shame in recognizing when someone's mind simply isn't going to be changed on something.

The Committee In Its Own Words

"For me, the biggest benefit of being in student government has been getting to see how both the university and the city of Kirksville handled the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest advice I could give to new members would be to act quickly in what you want to do. I think I sort of underestimated the time and effort required to put on big events, and so I'd tell any new member to act sooner rather than later."

- *Dan Fox*

"I think the best part about being in Student Government was the opportunity to make a serious impact on both the student body and the city. Working for External Affairs provided me with a lot of ideas relating to how I could participate in the community of Kirksville, which was the thing that I wanted most after coming to Truman. If you want to be involved in a super real sense with Kirksville at large, you should go ahead and get involved in student government."

- *Mike Owsley*

"Being a part of External has really allowed me to not only learn more about local law and policy but connect Truman's community to Kirksville community. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to take on projects like Election Day Off, the Kirksville mask mandate, vaccine lobbying and the voter registration drive. We have accomplished so much during this chaotic year, thanks to our fearless leader, Kiren MacLeod."

- *Morgan Sprehe*

"Though our efforts this year have been more modest than previously (thanks in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic), I am proud of what we have accomplished irrespective. Despite the tumult of the academic year our club managed to pass several high-quality resolutions and bills, and I am proud of my participation in those efforts.. I hope that the next External committee can continue to build on our committee's good work, and build better relations between the Kirksville community and Truman community."

- *PJ Wuennenberg*