



Chair Cowles, members of the Board of Trustees,

Students United will not be able to join for live testimony this month due to our student leaders' class and work schedules, a reality that is reflective of much of the student body. Entering the 2021-2022 school year is complicated and hectic, especially as many students feel they are making up for lost time and still dealing with the pandemic's barriers. This includes our brilliant, and busy, new Board of Directors.

As a refresher, Students United's Board of Directors is composed of the seven university Student Body Presidents, or their appointee, and three elected student officers. This year's State Chair is Emma Zellmer: She was the Vice Chair last year and is a student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, studying philosophy, political science and economics. Arnavee Maltare is our Vice Chair this year: She is also a student at Minnesota State University, Mankato studying Management Information Systems. Pierre Young is this year's Treasurer: He is currently a student at Metropolitan State University working towards his Studio Arts B.A. degree with a minor in Game Studies. Pierre also has a Computer Graphics and Visualization A.S. degree and Associate of Arts degree from Saint Paul College.

As you all know, last year's students had an all-zoom academic year. Our board last year never met in-person until just a few weeks ago. They held conferences online, made major decisions online, protected their fellow students online, and even lobbied state and federal legislators online. Our organization felt deeply for the students who had no opportunity for in-person activities or fun while they worked so hard to advocate and lead our organization last year. So, we surprised them and independently fundraised to take them all, as alumni, to Washington DC for a makeup in-person federal advocacy trip.

As the Trustees meet, we are in Washington DC with last year's student leaders to meet with Congressmembers about student loan forgiveness, doubling the funding for the Federal Pell Grant, and reforms to the Public Student Loan Forgiveness Program which has not successfully forgiven the loans of millions who were told they were eligible for it. We are incredibly proud of, and grateful for, the dozens of students who have led this organization through these unprecedented events.

This summer, Students United adopted our new strategic plan. The strategic planning process involved students, alumni, staff, partners, and donors who came together to determine the direction of our organization for the next five years. The theme of our plan is Back to Our Roots, reviving and grounding ourselves in the core purpose of our organization. As a result, Students United is approaching this academic year, and the work we do with the system, through the strategic direction established in this plan:



Mission: Lead by Minnesota State University students, we are the inclusive voice for all future, current, and former students. We actively work to represent and support Minnesota State University students and advocate at a local, system, state, and federal level for higher education policies that make a positive impact for our students and communities.

Vision: Our vision is to create the model of inclusive higher education policies and leadership. Our goal is to ensure higher education is rooted in student voices and student needs. Student leaders at all decision-making tables strengthen student advocacy, which creates a more robust higher education system and community.

Values: STUDENTS

- Student voice
- Thought leaders
- United leadership
- Diversity
- Equity and inclusion
- Next level thinking
- Tangible advocacy
- Student leadership

We established our **long-term advocacy objectives:** Higher Education Affordability, Accessibility, and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI.) The new Board of Directors has chosen the advocacy priorities for this year within these long-term objectives. You will hear more about these priorities in October.

We identified three **guiding philosophies:** Student Leadership, Student Development, and Student Voice. As a result, we are getting more involved in the student consultation process, developing multiple new programs, including a student leadership curriculum, and more.

We grounded ourselves in two **themes:** Black Lives Matter and the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of this strategic plan, we are committed to ensuring Students United makes internal progress on Equity 2030. As we stated to the Board of Trustees last April in unity with our partners, Students United believes the goal of Equity 2030—to reduce gaps in outcomes for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students—is right, urgent, and an imperative. But it is only possible as a collective, collaborative effort that includes all stakeholders. If this is done while centering the voices of those most impacted, honoring the labor being done, distributing labor in proportion to resources, and pushing ourselves and each other to dream bigger about



what is possible, we absolutely can meaningfully move towards eliminating these inequities.

As such, Students United has informed the system office of our Equity 2030 commitments for this year. These include a commitment to bringing first-generation, low-income, and students of color directly into system councils, committees, and workgroups; compensating students—the only stakeholders in this system who participate in shared governance without pay—for their service on system councils/committees; expanding our role in ensuring a meaningful student consultation process with diverse viewpoints represented; and much more.

This academic year presents an opportunity we have all been dreaming about for a long time. We have the chance to “come back” better, stronger, and more accessible and equitable than ever. Students United is hopeful the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor and Presidents, and all system leaders feel deeply aware of, and moved by, this opportunity the importance of not wasting it. We have been repeating for years the importance of proactive, centralized, accessible leadership that centers students’ voices. We are, and have been, functionally in a State of Emergency. It warrants new, urgent, and transformative ways of operating and leading. We encourage members of the Trustees, system and campus leaders, and all leaders in our system to reach out to Students United, ask us questions and engage with our testimony, and utilize our team to accomplish these goals together.

Sincerely,

Emma Zellmer, 2021-2022 State Chair

Arnavee Maltare, 2021-2022 Vice Chair

Pierre Young, 2021-2022 Treasurer