

University Committee on Student Life and Engagement

Election Slate

University Committee on Academic Governance

February 7, 2025



Emily J Abrams (Page 1 of 4)

Unit: Undergraduate Education

Academic Appointment & Rank: Academic Specialist – Advisor – Continuing

Initial MSU Appointment: 2022

Previous Academic Governance Service:

Also Applied To:



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I am deeply interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement because it aligns with my professional commitment to fostering academic wellness and holistic success for marginalized student populations. As an Academic Success Coordinator in the TRIO SSS program, I have dedicated my career to supporting first-generation, low-income, and disabled college students—populations that are often underserved, yet brimming with potential. My role bridges two critical areas: meeting one-on-one with students to provide personalized guidance pertaining to their studies and strategically planning initiatives, programs, and workshops to enhance the academic success and overall well-being of the diverse student body we serve in TRIO.

In my individual meetings with students, I take a student-centered, justice-oriented approach. I work to understand their unique challenges and strengths, helping them navigate barriers to their success while empowering them to also advocate for their needs. Whether we're discussing time management, accessing campus resources, or managing potentially distressing experiences, I prioritize listening to and honoring students' lived experiences. These conversations not only support individual students but also inform my broader work by providing invaluable insight into systemic gaps and areas for institutional improvement.



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On a programmatic level, I approach planning with a critical lens, continuously reflecting on ways to address structural inequities. I do so by designing workshops, implementing our peer tutoring program, and collaborating with campus partners in ways that create opportunities which center equity, inclusion, and cultural humility. For example, I've worked on initiatives to demystify the graduate school preparation process for first-generation students so that they have ample opportunities to set themselves up for successful admissions cycles while also maintaining the responsibilities of their undergraduate programs in which they are still actively enrolled. These efforts stem from my belief that universities must intentionally cultivate environments where all students, regardless of their background, feel valued and empowered to succeed both during and beyond their time at the university.

Serving on this committee is a natural extension of the work I already do in my role. My professional experiences provide a nuanced understanding of the intersectional barriers that many students face, as well as the systemic changes needed to foster meaningful engagement and success. One of the key aspects of my work is fostering connections—whether between students and resources, students and their peers, or students and institutional systems. By serving on this committee, I can bring the insights I gain from working directly with students into broader conversations about campus policies, programs, and initiatives. For instance, my one-on-one work with students often highlights systemic barriers, such as significant financial stressors and lack of access to basic essential needs, that prevent students from fully engaging in campus life. This committee provides a platform to advocate for changes that address these barriers at a systemic level.

Ultimately, this committee represents an opportunity to integrate the work I do within my program into broader university efforts. It is a chance to extend my commitment to academic wellness, equity, and inclusion beyond the populations I directly serve and contribute to a culture of care and engagement that benefits the entire campus community. I am excited to collaborate with others to enhance student life and engagement in ways that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of our students.



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Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

Throughout my career, I have actively advanced diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) through my professional roles, research, and advocacy. My work is grounded in the understanding that diversity recognizes the full spectrum of identities and experiences; equity ensures fair access and opportunities by addressing systemic barriers; and inclusion fosters environments where all individuals feel valued, a sense of belonging, respected, and empowered to thrive.

As an Academic Specialist in TRIO Student Support Services, I work directly with first-generation, low-income, and disabled students, providing personalized academic and holistic support to help them navigate systems often not designed with their needs in mind. My work includes meeting with students one-on-one to address barriers to their success, designing programming to build their confidence and academic skills, and advocating for policies and practices that promote their well-being and equity on campus.

I also have worked to help create and oversee the Pathways Programs Essential Needs Pantry, which provides food, hygiene products, and other essential resources to students experiencing basic needs insecurity. This work directly tackles equity issues by addressing one of the most significant barriers to student success: access to essential needs. This is particularly impactful to our students who are multiply marginalized, as many, if not most, of the students in the Pathways Programs that have access to this service hold multiple marginalized identities. By helping Pathways students meet their basic needs, we help enable them to focus on their education and personal development without the added stress of financial and food insecurity.

In addition to my professional role, I serve as the staff advisor for the Graduate Student Accessibility and Support Network (GSASN), a student organization for disabled graduate students. Through this role, I work closely with our E-board to help foster a sense of belonging, amplify disabled graduate student voices, and advocate for systemic changes that improve accessibility and inclusion across the institution. This work not only strengthens the community for disabled graduate students but also pushes for broader cultural and policy shifts that benefit all disabled students on campus.



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My commitment to DEI is also evident in my doctoral dissertation research, which focuses on college mental health and the lived experiences of students in distress. This work highlights the intersection of mental health, ableism and sanism, and student success, with the goal of informing more inclusive and supportive campus mental health practices that do not rely solely on counseling and psychiatric services. By centering student voices and lived experiences, my research contributes to a deeper understanding of what students are actually experiencing and how institutions can create environments that better support all students, particularly those navigating complex challenges.



Audra Foster (Page 1 of 2)

Unit: College of Law

Academic Appointment & Rank: Academic Specialist – Outreach – Continuing – Senior Specialist

Initial MSU Appointment: 2023

Previous Academic Governance Service:

Also Applied To:



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I am the Director of Pathway Programs Outreach and Education in the MSU College of Law. I have 27 years experience in higher education administration including planning and implementing numerous recruitment, retention, academic success, and career development programs. At the COL, I work with high school and college students who have an interest in a legal career to develop skills, make connections, find mentors, and participate in leadership development activities. I am responsible for coordinating our week-long orientation program "Foundations Week" and I organize our Prelaw Programs, Mentorship Program, and Admitted Students Days. As an attorney, I am adept at policy work. As an Outreach specialist, it would serve me well to meet more MSU leaders across campus. And as an academic, I love helping students get the most out of their educational experience.

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

I am a member of the State Bar of Michigan's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, I have presented Road to Law School presentations to underrepresented youth around Michigan, I coordinated a high-school level Just the Beginning Foundation week-long Prelaw Summer Exploration Program for several years, and ran a college level Council on Legal Education Opportunity Summer Academy for several years. I am currently working on an AccessLex grant funded summer in-residence program for summer 2025 for students underrepresented in law here at MSU.



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The Foundations Week orientation program I coordinate is grounded in demystifying law school and the legal profession, building foundational skills and forging key contacts that maximize student success, as well as nurtures an inclusive environment.

As the capstone of the week, the Access to Justice curriculum instills the need for equity in representation and legal services. Students travel by bus to legal service providers across Lansing and East Lansing, to make first legal mentor connections, hear from lawyer leaders about access to justice issues prevalent in the legal system and what the attorneys (and they as law students) can do to help move the profession forward.

(Optional) Use this space to add anything else you would like those considering your application to know, including whether you are willing to serve on multiple academic governance bodies and whether you would prefer to serve on certain academic governance bodies over others.

I am still building my programs at the law school. I want to serve the larger university, but do not want to take on too much. I believe, given my knowledge and experience, the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement is the best match.



Robert LaDuca (Page 1 of 1)

Unit: Lyman Briggs College, and College of Natural Science

Academic Appointment & Rank: Professor - Tenured

Initial MSU Appointment: 2004

Previous Academic Governance Service: The Steering Committee, Faculty Senate, University Committee on Curriculum, University Committee on Undergraduate Education

Also Applied To: At-Large Members of the Steering Committee



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I have had significant undergraduate teaching and research mentoring throughout my 20 years on the Faculty. My majority appointment in Lyman Briggs College has granted me experience in interacting with students outside of the classroom, hearing their major concerns.

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

I have hosted numerous students from under-represented groups in my chemistry research laboratory, which has earned them authorship on peer-reviewed publications. Additionally I form inclusive groups in my General Chemistry classes allowing students to work collaboratively with those who hail from different backgrounds.

(Optional) Use this space to add anything else you would like those considering your application to know, including whether you are willing to serve on multiple academic governance bodies and whether you would prefer to serve on certain academic governance bodies over others.



Jieron M. Robinson (Page 1 of 2)

Unit: Undergraduate Education

Academic Appointment & Rank: Academic Specialist – Advisor – Continuing

Initial MSU Appointment: 2023

Previous Academic Governance Service: Faculty Senate, University Committee on Graduate Studies

Also Applied To:



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I'm interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement (UCSLE) because I care deeply about supporting students and creating an environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. In my role as Program Director for TRIO Student Support Services (SSS), I work closely with students, particularly those from first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities. I see firsthand how policies can either support or create barriers to their academic and personal success. Serving on UCSLE would give me the chance to advocate for policies that truly meet the needs of all students and help them thrive. Over the years, I've gained valuable experience in working with students and collaborating with campus partners to address challenges and open doors to opportunity. I've seen how thoughtful policies can make a huge difference in student achievement, and I've worked within institutional frameworks to help students navigate their rights and responsibilities. I'd bring this perspective, along with my ability to work with diverse groups of people, to the committee. Ultimately, I want to make sure that student voices are heard and that the policies we create help every student feel supported, engaged, and empowered to reach their goals.



Jieron M. Robinson (Page 2 of 2)

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion has always been apart of my work, in my current position and in past roles I've held. I work every day to ensure the students in my program students feel seen, valued, and supported in ways that help them thrive both academically and personally. Whether it's through designing programs, advocating for resources, or simply listening to students' needs, I'm committed to fostering a sense of belonging and equity. Looking ahead, I plan to continue advocating for meaningful change by working on policies and initiatives that address systemic inequities in my area. I'm passionate about creating spaces where every student feels empowered to succeed and ensuring their voices are heard in shaping the campus experience. To me, advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion means building a community where everyone has a fair chance to reach their potential and feels they truly belong..



Heather Shea (Page 1 of 2)

Unit: Undergraduate Education/Office of the Provost

Academic Appointment & Rank: Academic Specialist – Outreach – Continuing

Initial MSU Appointment: 2013

Previous Academic Governance Service:

Also Applied To:



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I am excited to apply for a position on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement because I am deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and thriving campus environment that prioritizes student success, equity, and belonging. Proviso to my current role in the Office of the Provost/Undergraduate Education, I have spent over two decades working primarily in student affairs and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) units, developing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of student engagement and well-being. My recent term as president of ACPA–College Student Educators International (2023–2024), the leading professional association for student affairs educators, highlights my dedication to advancing the student affairs profession and my ability to lead initiatives that have national and international impact. Through this role, I gained valuable insights into best practices for supporting diverse student populations and creating environments where students can thrive both academically and personally. In addition to my professional leadership, I hold a PhD in higher education and have served as affiliate faculty in the Student Affairs Administration MA program. This academic background equips me with a strong foundation in theory and research, as well as a commitment to data-informed decision-making that enhances the student experience. Serving on this committee would allow me to contribute my expertise to MSU's efforts to enrich the lives of its students and ensure that our university continues to be a place where all students feel supported, engaged, and valued. I am eager to collaborate with others who share this passion for student success and to bring my unique perspective to the important work of this committee.



Heather Shea (Page 2 of 2)

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

Throughout my career, advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has been central to my work in higher education. Currently, as the Director of Pathway Programs, I focus on fostering undergraduate student success, with a particular emphasis on supporting students from underrepresented and minoritized backgrounds. These cohort-based programs are intentionally designed to bridge opportunity gaps, create community, and provide holistic support to ensure all students can thrive and graduate. Previously, I served as the inaugural Director of Women*s Student Services within the Division of Student Life & Engagement in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). In this role, I developed and implemented programs aimed at creating equitable opportunities for women and nonbinary students, elevating their voices, and fostering a sense of belonging. This work underscored my belief that DEIB principles are essential to cultivating campus environments where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. My understanding of DEI extends beyond representation; I view it as a continuous process of identifying and addressing systemic inequities while creating conditions that promote student learning and holistic development. Looking ahead, I plan to continue centering DEI in my work by advocating for equitable policies and practices, collaborating with campus and community partners, and ensuring that student support initiatives remain inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of our community.



Marty Spranger (Page 1 of 2)

Unit: College of Natural Science

Academic Appointment & Rank: Associate Professor – Fixed-Term

Initial MSU Appointment: 2014

Previous Academic Governance Service:

Also Applied To: At-Large Members of the Steering Committee




Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I have 20 years of university teaching experience, including the past 10 years here at MSU. Over this time, I have developed a deep understanding of the challenges students face in the academic environment. I have also served on my department's Education and DEI Committees for several years and this work has strengthened my commitment to championing inclusive, equitable, and high-quality educational experiences. I look forward to bringing my perspective and expertise to the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement to help identify student issues and concerns and working together to find meaningful solutions. I recognize the importance and time commitment of the role and am fully prepared to prioritize these responsibilities. I am excited about the opportunity to serve my university and to provide my insight for the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and contribute to leadership that shapes the future of our university for the betterment of our students. Respectfully Marty

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

I have a longstanding commitment to DEI. In my department, I have served on the DEI & OC Committee since 2021. Notably, the DEI & OCC created a list of Shared Values, or "We Will," statements for our departmental website and developed and administered a DEI and organizational climate survey to our department. While at WSU, I taught in a postbaccalaureate program for minoritized students for 10 years. I worked closely with about 25 students each semester and found this to be very rewarding. When I came to MSU, I reached out to the Director of the Drew Science Scholars Program (DSSP). The DSSP is designed for talented, multicultural/multi-racial undergraduate STEM students.



Marty Spranger (Page 2 of 2)

Unfortunately, the students from the DSSP do not enroll in PSL 250. However, once I took over PSL 310 last year, I reached out again, and have since partnered with the DSSP as a Drew Scholars Science Professor. I teach a course–NSC 203–where I work closely with 5–10 DSSP students each semester that are concurrently enrolled in my PSL 310 course. With NSC 203, I provide these students with personalized academic coaching and work to develop strong, sustainable personal and professional relationships with them. I have also done professional development work on DEI. I enrolled in a 7-week course on inclusive teaching in higher STEM education and participated in an MSU Dialogues session on Building Inclusive Communities. I incorporate DEI into my classroom as well, working to ensure my students feel welcome, a sense of belonging, and supported in their learning journey, regardless of their background or experiences. I strive to create an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and all students feel empowered to participate and succeed.



Erica Weeks (Page 1 of 2)

Unit: College of Engineering

Academic Appointment & Rank: Academic Specialist – Advisor – Continuing

Initial MSU Appointment: 2012

Previous Academic Governance Service:

Also Applied To:



Please explain why you are interested in serving on the University Committee on Student Life and Engagement and what qualifies you to do so.

I am interested in serving on the UC on SLE as I have been in the academic advising role for 12 years now and have worked with students from freshmen through senior status as they navigate everything from orientation to graduation and in-between. I currently hold a Director of Academic Advising title for the College of Engineering (~7,000 students), where I make decisions on students academic records and am providing information and resources to students regarding their rights and responsibilities when it comes to understanding FERPA, their academic status decisions (good standing, 67% completion warning, academic probation, recess, dismissal, and readmissions), medical leave eligibility, and any administrative function applicable to them and their academic record (grief absence, late drop, withdrawal, grade option changes, academic probation, etc.).

Please provide a brief statement about your past activities and/or future plans that have advanced or will aim to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, using your own understanding of those terms.

I am a lived experience of groups that are commonly underserved. As a first-generation college student, student parent, veteran, woman of color from Lansing, MI, I have come to understand especially the significant financial burden that can come with pursuing a college education under the assumption that being college educated will ostentatiously advance future generations of your family. Understanding this, I fund 3 \$500 scholarships that the sorority I advise for created in my name. One of the scholarships prioritizes awarding to a student parent or student of a single parent. In my second year working at MSU, I co-founded a workshop series "Mujeer a Mujeer" that continues to run today. The focus of the workshop series is to empower students at MSU through a series of workshops that are presented by inspirational role models.



Erica Weeks (Page 2 of 2)

I work in the College of Engineering and recently co-authored a grant proposal that was approved to financially support the education and preparation for first-generation, BIPOC Engineering students who are interested in participating in an education abroad program. As for my future plans, I intend to continue working collaboratively with two departments in Engineering that will focus on an inclusive series that cover lived experiences of alumni based on varying marginalized identities known in the field in order to provide awareness of those that have gone before them and have succeeded, learning from their advice on how to continue when you don't see anyone that looks like you in the classroom.

