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10-27-2021

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Student Government of Seattle University

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### Recommended Citation

Student Government of Seattle University, "Navigating Seattle University's Values and Expectations" (2021). *The Spectator Online*. 441.

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# Navigating Seattle University's Values and Expectations

## Student Government of Seattle University

Each year, members from the Student Government of Seattle University (SGSU) attend a conference to further develop leadership capabilities and connect with different universities. Due to the impact of C-19, the typical conferences like the Jesuit Student Government Alliance (JSGA) and the National Jesuit Student Leadership Conference (NJSJC) were unfortunately canceled. JSGA and NJSJC are conferences that allow members of Jesuit student governments to discuss the issues each student body is concerned with, share advice with one another and develop leadership skills to better serve. Essentially, these conferences allow a place for student leaders to work together and help one another by creating a network of students from coast to coast. It has allowed SGSU to create a network with other universities and students that can help when similar issues arrive on Seattle University's campus.



This year members of SGSU were invited to attend YAF's Campus Leadership Project with similar opportunities as NJSJC and JSGA, but this time with schools from across the entire country. SGSU was initially approached as an organization, but chose to allow students who were interested in this opportunity to attend separately as individuals. Three students who are members of SGSU chose to attend the all-inclusive conference. SGSU team members were given a chance to meet students from some of the largest schools in the nation.

In many ways, this conference presented itself as an opportunity to network and meet students from schools outside of the Jesuit network that SGSU currently works closely with. The other individuals who attended this conference came from other universities not in the Pacific Northwest. These universities were more conservative state schools—something SU is somewhat unfamiliar with navigating being a small Jesuit university—each school brought in different perspectives on the issues that were most important to their student bodies. Within these issues, similarities were found regarding being an advocate for the student body and working to improve the student experience.

After spending the past eighteen months working virtually, it was refreshing to finally get to collaborate with people in-person again: let alone student leaders from other schools. It was even more exciting for the three individuals who attended, as it was the first time they got to meet in-person. While they have gotten to work together over the last year virtually, seeing folks in-person had an impact on student governments getting excited and engaged for the upcoming year. The conference lasted three days and entailed a variety of topics such as finding your leadership style, building a strong team, and dealing with push back from administration. They met with countless other student governmental leaders about issues that concerned them and exchanged solutions and ideas on a variety of topics.

Almost unsurprisingly, every single student at the conference agreed that there needed to be more mental health resources and support on college campuses. This is something that has always been a big topic on Seattle U's campus. As universities such as Ohio State, Grand Canyon University, Clemson, and Idaho State, shared solutions that student governments have tried to implement, they felt a sense of pride in the support systems that Seattle U does have in place, resources like: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Health and Wellness Crew (HAWC), and Disability Services, as well as a sense that they still have work to do. A goal or priority that SGSU has been working on for years is ensuring more funding for CAPS and the push for university wide mental health days.

Another conversation that many schools were having was the concern over the lack of connectivity and community on campuses. Perhaps due to the ongoing pandemic, many students felt disconnected with the rest of the students on campus – and this was something that resonated with SGSU. They spent hours at the conference sharing stories of favorite campus traditions or events and took away great ideas that SGSU hopes to share with the student body. It has inspired SGSU to have conversations within our organization around how we want to engage the student body this year.

One thing that was surprising was how some schools struggle with free speech on their campuses. A school at the conference mentioned how their students are only allowed to protest on campus in a designated protest zone. Listening to what was shared and learning from their experiences has helped us build compassion. As we conversed with our peers, we wanted to acknowledge our gratitude for SU's community of amazing staff, faculty, and students who are interested and engaged when conversing a variety of issues and topics.

When students from other universities asked about environmentally conscious attitudes going on at different campuses, our team shared how our school banned plastic water bottles from being distributed on our campus. In previous conferences, SGSU shared how SU divested as a result of feeling pressured by their students. SGSU has laid a foundation for other universities to follow. For example, Creighton University has recently divested. Having these conversations is vital for students that are interested in learning how SU overcame obstacles in going green. Including the opportunities to share struggles and successes with other students across the nation is important to making progress on our own campus.

The takeaways from this conference were that many students across the country deal with a lot of similar issues as Seattle University. Mental health, community belonging, and inclusion were among the three areas that have become the focus of universities nationwide. SGSU will include these themes in our legislative agenda for the 2021-2022 academic year. We chose these themes for our agenda in correspondence with our annual State of the Undergraduate Student Survey (SUSS). We found that a vast proportion of the feedback gathered related to these overarching themes.

Although this was not a typical conference for SGSU members, we felt this opportunity was something we just had to see. Something that we were reminded of through this experience was that everyone has ideas, everyone has concerns and everyone has a voice which is why it is important to maintain open lines of communication. We are continuously reminded that each student's experience is not only valuable to themselves, but also to the community.

SGSU was glad to share different perspectives and help other student leaders know what we stand and strive for in the Seattle U community. We hope to continue our work from previous years into this year. SGSU wants to build up the collective student spirit, address the ongoing mental health awareness, and become a more sustainable campus. As student leaders, we want to encourage a community that not only works together, but grows together.