A central responsibility for elected officials includes listening to and advocating for the interests of those who have elected them (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Moreover, the practice of advocating for those represented builds trust and organizational commitment among members (Perry, 2004). Thus, this year’s NASSM student symposium session will directly respond to NASSM students’ feedback and desire for multiple facilitated touch-points for purposeful networking throughout the NASSM 2020 conference.

As described in detail below, this symposium will begin with a “speed dating” style of facilitated networking among students. The session will then transition into an idea-generation activity where students can interactively brainstorm “hot topics and burning questions” that they have. The student attendees will be encouraged to share their interests and questions, ranging from research ideas to soft skill development, to professional development. The faculty members who have signed up for the student-faculty mentor initiative will be invited to join the symposium for the final 30 minutes of the session. As per student feedback, this symposium session will not end with the designated ending time—this session will be a preliminary effort of crowd-sourcing hot topics and burning questions to then be used to facilitate student interaction at the student social (this symposium will require that the session takes place before the student social).

We have received feedback from students that connecting with students from other institutions prior to the student social proves difficult. Further, when at the social, most of the time is spent on introductions, rather than building relationships. Through facilitating a designated meeting time, students can engage in building relationships throughout the conference. Further, we have an opportunity to make the conference and student social more engaging and purposeful for students. Thus, the “hot topics and burning questions” activity will be used to build on the facilitated networking session to generate conversation and idea-sharing among students. Through bringing the activity back at the student social, the connections and conversations established during the symposium session can be extended throughout the conference. The initial session will require a space with poster board/chart paper/markers/sticky notes where students can write “hot topics and burning questions” they would like to discuss during the symposium. After the symposium, the topics generated will be grouped into themes. The themes will then be displayed on poster board/chart paper dispersed throughout the student social space, where students can gather to discuss the topic of that area. This activity addresses the expressed need for facilitated interaction among students during the conference, including student social.

Finally, while there is majority support for the flexible format of the faculty-mentor initiative, some students have expressed the need for a facilitated time to touch base with their faculty mentors. Furthermore, many faculty members have busy conference schedules, allowing little opportunities for students to introduce themselves. The informal time for faculty and students to connect will help address this concern.