

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS
MINUTES OF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 22, 2003

[In these minutes: Welcome & Introductions; Review of Committee Charge; Mount Graham, Essential Medicines and Paper & Printer Resolutions Updates; Divestiture from Israel; Brainstorm a List of Possible Agenda Items for the Year]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Margaret Kuchenreuther chair, Ruth Taylor, Roger Beck, Karen Holtmeier, Susan Von Bank, Greg Schooler, Julie Sweitzer, Thomas Augst, Kenneth Heller, Mani Subramani, Kara Ferguson, Bobak Ha'Eri, Joel Helfrich, Joseph Nowak, Brian Wachutka, Melissa Williams

REGRETS: Judi Linder, Ravi Norman, Michelle Dawson, Jennifer Oliphant, Ben Senauer, Brandi Linderman

ABSENT: Robert Blair

OTHER(S): Amy Olson, Executive Director, Hillel Foundation of B'Nai B'Rith and Julie Sweiler, Director of Public Affairs, Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)

I). Professor Kuchenreuther called the meeting to order and asked all present to introduce themselves.

II). ANNOUNCEMENTS:

In the interest of paper conservation, an electronic agenda will be sent to members prior to each meeting. Paper copies will not be provided at the meetings. Therefore, if members want a copy of the agenda in front of them at each meeting, they were instructed to bring their own copy.

On a similar note, Professor Kuchenreuther stated that there are recycling bins available either inside or immediately outside committee meeting rooms and requested that members properly dispose of their recyclable garbage at the end

of each meeting.

III). Professor Kuchenreuther noted that in conjunction with the reorganization of the Senate structure, Professor Judith Martin, chair of the SCC, requested that all Senate committees review their charge and make suggestions for changes. To give new members an understanding of what type of issues the Committee addresses, Professor Kuchenreuther recapped some of the more recent issues the Committee tackled. Further, Professor Kuchenreuther noted that at the next meeting on October 27th meeting, the Committee would engage in a more in depth review of the charge and entertain any changes members believe are warranted. The Social Concerns charge can be found at the following URL:

<http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/committees/soccon.html> Members wishing to make significant changes to the charge were asked to get their recommendations to either Professor Kuchenreuther or Renee Dempsey, Senate staff, prior to the October 27th meeting, so this language can be distributed to members in order to allow time for review.

A member noted that within the Committee's charge it states that the Committee should "initiate on a regular basis campus fora on current controversial issues" and asked whether this has been done in the past. Professor Kuchenreuther stated this has not been done on a regular basis but noted that fora were held when the Committee addressed the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) issue. It was noted that the Committee has little to no budget and so any speakers at a forum would need to volunteer their time unless funds could be found somewhere to pay these individuals.

IV). OLD BUSINESS:

A). The following resolutions were passed last year:

- Mt. Graham International Observatory / Large Binocular Telescope Resolution
- Double-sided Printer Resolution
- Recycled Paper Resolution
- Essential Medicines Resolution

Each of these resolutions will be brought to the October 30th Senate meeting. Professor Kuchenreuther stated it will be very difficult for her to physically attend all Senate meetings and believes to participate via conference call is not particularly effective. As a result, Professor Kuchenreuther asked members that

spearheaded each of these resolutions to introduce them on the Senate floor. Joel Helfrich agreed to introduce the Mount Graham Resolution and Brian Wachutka agreed to usher in both the Printer and Paper Resolutions.

A member recommended the Committee discuss and decide on the main talking points it wants noted with respect to each resolution. The Committee agreed at its next meeting on October 27th to briefly discuss the points it wants brought forward regarding each resolution.

The member from last year that brought forward the Essential Medicines Resolution, Professor Susan Craddock, is on sabbatical this year, and, therefore, is unable to introduce this resolution to the Senate. Professor Kuchenreuther asked if anyone on the Committee feels knowledgeable enough about the issue to bring it forward at the October 30th Senate meeting. Hearing no one volunteer, Professor Kuchenreuther volunteered to try and identify someone to introduce the Essential Medicines Resolution to the Senate.

All of these resolutions will be posted to the Social Concerns website for members to review <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/committees/soccon.html> Then, at the next Social Concerns meeting members will discuss talking points that should be brought forward to the Senate on each of these resolutions.

B). Last year two resolutions were introduced concerning the University's divestment from Israel. This issue was tabled at the end of last year with the idea that the Committee would work towards bringing this topic to a conclusion by December 2003. Professor Kuchenreuther asked members how they would like to proceed with this subject. This is a very complex issue. New members were encouraged to review the minutes from last year, which can be found at the following URL: <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/minutes/socconmins.html> to get a synopsis of the issues that were brought forward.

Melissa Williams proposed the Committee obtain more information on the subject by:

1. Viewing a video by Na'eem Jeenah, from the Palestine Solidarity Committee of South Africa. Na'eem Jeenah is an author, journalist, community leader, former anti-apartheid activist and post-graduate student as well as a PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, where he also teaches in the Political Studies Department. His research has focused

on Islamic Feminisms and Political Islam in South Africa. Over the past two years, much of his activism work has been in Palestine solidarity.

2. Conducting informational sessions (fora).
3. Establishing a Social Concerns investment subcommittee to research the University's investments in countries with human rights issues and set up a process for handling such investments.

Questions and comments from members regarding this issue included:

- A member asked, because bias is always a concern in dealing with this type of issue, if the University has a faculty member that could provide members with an unbiased, objective, informational session on the issue of divestment.
- It was noted that the issue is so vast and in the interest of time, members will need to rely on 'experts' on the issue to gather information for them.
- An issue that was raised last year was the fact that the Committee does not have access to information on how the University Foundation invests its funds. Therefore, whatever the Committee decides will have no impact on the University Foundations' investments, only the University's endowment fund.
- What is the point of this resolution? Is it the general, worldwide non-support of countries with human rights violations? What is the definition of a human rights violation? This issue requires a well-defined set of principles without disputed facts.
- A member views the Social Concerns Committee's charge as acting as morale witness around this and similar subjects. Further, it is important that the Committee not take a side on such a heated issue that unleashes a lot of emotion. Therefore, this issue, in particular, would be a good one around which to organize fora.
- A member questioned who would attend the fora? Would it only be those with an "ax to grind" related to the issue?
- Professor Kuchenreuther noted this topic would best be presented via a debate with both sides being represented at a public event.
- A member stated that if fora will be held, bringing this issue to a conclusion by December 2003 is not realistic.
- There will be a conference this spring sponsored by University faculty on this subject. Ms. Williams suggested the Committee sponsor a set of fora, as well as promote and attend this conference and use the information collected from these sources to make a decision on this issue.

- It was noted that debates on the divestiture from Israel issue are prone to be very heated. Therefore, it was proposed that individuals prepare written questions for the speakers and allow them to answer them as a way to curtail the forum from getting out of control.
- A member suggested making the divestiture from Israel a major project for the year by having members educate themselves on the issue and bring it forward to the attention of the University community.
- A member noted that while divestment from Israel is an important issue, he would not want this to be the Committee's main concern for the year because there are other more pressing, local concerns that deserve the Committee's attention as well.
- A member noted the University's Parliamentary Debate Society may be interested in debating this issue. Members Joel Helfrich and Bobak Ha'Eri will explore this idea further.
- Discuss the concept of divestiture separate from the Israeli issue. Who is impacted by divestiture? Before the Committee spends any more time on this issue it would be nice to know whether divestiture is an effective tool for social change. Professor Kuchenreuther will research whether there is an academic(s) in the metro area that could speak to this issue.
- Professor Kuchenreuther asked members their opinions on whether an investment subcommittee should be established as recommended earlier by Ms. Williams. According to Ms. Williams this would be a way to address and separate out the financial/economic concerns of University investments as it relates to countries involved in human rights violations. Members agreed such a subcommittee would not be workable and is not within the jurisdiction of the Committee. Ms. Williams disagreed. Greg Schooler of Asset Management noted that in many ways an investment subcommittees' duties and responsibilities would overlap with the proxy resolutions that the Committee votes on annually. Members discussed instead a subcommittee to develop fora on the Israeli divestiture issue. A member recommended revisiting whether a subcommittee should be established at the October 27th meeting when the Committee reviews its charge.

In closing, Professor Kuchenreuther asked members to think about what information they need to be able to vote on this resolution. What type of information should the Committee organize and present to the larger University community on this issue? These are things the Committee will discuss in October.

V). Professor Kuchenreuther asked members to generate a list of agenda items it would like to address this academic year. Then, at the October meeting members can prioritize this list. The following ideas were generated:

- Discuss health care benefits. Invite Professor Morrison, chair, Benefits Advisory Committee (BAC) to provide members with an update on the issues the BAC has been dealing with in light of budget reductions and the soaring cost of benefits.
- Service learning and civic engagement issues. Attempt to think about social issues less abstractly and more locally and immediately. What can the University do to make this easier for students? How can service learning and civic engagement be integrated into the curriculum? What can the University do to integrate service learning and civic engagement into the marketing of the University to the State? Consider instituting a service learning requirement for all students at the University.
- Explore substandard housing for students and rental property issues.
- Discuss energy issues and encourage the University to further explore the use of green energy.
- Discuss what the University is doing in terms of genetic manipulation and patenting of wild rice.
- Examine K-12 links with the University. What can the University do to enhance its relationship with K-12? To what extent does/should the University support the metro K-12 education system? What can the University do in terms of outreach with K-12? Professor Heller suggested that this Committee could focus its efforts on raising the University's presence in the K-12 system and have the University be more connected with that part of our social environment. K - 12 affects every social issue.
- Discuss the stadium issue.
- Debate the conceal and carry law.

A member requested that the Committee frame the way it deals with the issues it decides to address by making specific recommendations to the University versus just comments on social issues. Another member suggested that the Committee hear from experts on each of the subjects it decides to tackle in order to make the most informed recommendations possible.

Professor Kuchenreuther recommended that at the October meeting the Committee vote on which issues it wants to address.

VI). Hearing no further business, Professor Kuchenreuther adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate