

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 13, 2004

[In these minutes: Welcome and Introductions, Announcements, Lehman Brothers Resolution and Renewable Energy Resolution Updates, Brainstorm about Agenda Items for Future Meetings]

[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: Ken Heller, chair, Barbara Boysen, Jennifer Oliphant, Peter Hiniker, Sandy Ulsaker Wiese, Gerald Rinehart, Greg Schooler, Julie Sweitzer, Susan Craddock, Katherine Fennelly, David Fox, Julie Pelletier, Mani Subramani, Elaine Tarone, Leonard Roy

REGRETS: Ruth Taylor, Susan Von Bank, Shaun Laden

ABSENT: Ravi Norman

OTHER: Kara Ferguson

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

II). Professor Heller announced that the Committee<sup>1</sup>'s meeting time has been changed to 1:30 - 3:00 instead of 2:30 - 4:00 due to a teaching conflict in his schedule.

It is Professor Heller<sup>1</sup>'s goal for the Committee to deal as expeditiously as possible with the issues that come before it. He hopes that much of the Committee<sup>1</sup>'s work, in terms of crafting language for statements/resolutions and communicating points of view, can be conducted over email. Additionally, in order for the Committee to use its limited face-to-face meeting time as

effectively as possible, it will be important for members be familiar with the issues being addressed before they get to each meeting.

Professor Heller also noted that rather than distributing a lot of handouts at each meeting, that members bring with them any information that has been disseminated to them electronically.

Finally, Renee Dempsey, Senate staff, noted that because Committee participation is very important, if a member has three consecutive, unexcused absences they will be asked to step down from the Committee.

III). Professor Heller reported that both the Lehman Brothers Resolution and the Renewable Energy Resolution, which were passed last spring, are on the September 30, 2004 Senate docket for information. He noted that in the past the Committee was criticized for failing to consult with other Senate committees on issues that had far-reaching impacts. Therefore, whenever the Social Concerns Committee passes a resolution/statement, Professor Heller intends to inform the respective chair(s) of these committee(s) as part of the consultation process.

A member asked how issues come before the Committee. Professor Heller explained the process and gave examples of the breadth of issues the Committee deals with. He noted that, for example, members can bring issues forward, people within the University community can bring issues forward, etc.

IV). Possible agenda items for the 2004 - 2005 academic year:

- Draft a unified list of criteria for University investments.
- Designate a portion of the Committee<sup>1</sup>'s website to communicate the issues it is dealing with and to list fora and events related to these issues.
- Recommend to the University that a committee, similar to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), be formed to evaluate the social impact of research being conducted at the University; not simply human subject and vertebrate animal research. Such a committee could help researchers think about the social concerns ramifications of their research and possible alternatives to their research design.

This idea was derived from difficulties arising with the Mount Graham astronomy site. Comments/questions from members included:

- If the Committee plans to do this, it should first examine the IRB protocol in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
  - To make sure that the protocol is not rigorous to the point of being almost obstructionist.
  - It would be difficult to come up with a general list of questions that would cover all types of research.
  - Creating such a committee may not eliminate certain issues coming before the Social Concerns Committee. Isn't it Social Concerns charge to deal with these types of issues, so why recommend another committee be established?
  - If a new committee were created it would need to have authority to grant, deny or suggest modifications in research requests, unlike the Social Concerns Committee, which has no such power.
  - This solution of another committee might be much worse than the problem. From an administrative point of view, this idea could cost the University a significant amount of time and money. Protecting humans from harm is a different issue than protecting them from offense.
  - Instead of creating a new committee, perhaps the scope of the IRB should be expanded. This could be a way to reform and expand on the current process.
- Put on the agenda at the end of every meeting an announcement section so members can share information on upcoming events related to issues of social concern.
  - Discuss what the University is doing in terms of genetic manipulation and patenting of wild rice. It was noted that the University is in the process of taking steps to change the way it patents and licenses its agricultural resources.
  - Explore the implications of the University of Minnesota/Maranatha Christian Student Fellowship lawsuit, which permits the Maranatha Christian Student Fellowship to discriminate in their membership. In the past the University's EEO and Affirmative Action statements/policies prevented this type of discrimination, however, this suit sets a precedent for allowing student groups, with sincerely

held religious beliefs, exceptions from University policies prohibiting discrimination.

Members were encouraged to bring forward additional agenda items at future meetings or to email Renee Dempsey, Senate staff, who will disseminate these ideas to the group.

V). A member suggested sending each Senate committee chair a letter notifying them of the existence of the Social Concerns Committee and to remind them that if an issue of social concern arises in their committee to direct it to the Social Concerns Committee. Along these same lines, it was noted that the Senate Committee on Equity, Access and Diversity has its members monitor the minutes of other Senate committees in order to see if these other committees are dealing with issues that potentially could have an impact on matters related to equity, access and diversity.

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

Renee Dempsey  
University Senate