

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
APRIL 4, 2005

[In these minutes: Graduation Rate Discussion Continued, Renewable Energy Resolution, Graduate Assistant Unionization Discussion, Statement on Academic Freedom, Mount Graham, Research Secrecy Policy - SRC]

[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, Jennifer Oliphant, Ruth Taylor, Peter Hiniker, Lauren Gilchrist, Elizabeth Richardson, Susan Von Bank, Greg Schooler, Julie Sweitzer, Katherine Fennelly, David Fox, Julie Pelletier, Mani Subramani, Abby Bar-Lev, Kara Ferguson

REGRETS: Sandy Ulsaker Wiese, Amelious Whyte

ABSENT: Susan Craddock, Lonnie Bradford, Frances Doherty, Elizabeth Fuerst, Leonard Roy

I). Professor Heller called the meeting to order.

II). Professor Heller summarized the discussion from last month's meeting with Vice Provost Swan and Professor Marvin Marshak on graduation rates.

In terms of the Strategic Positioning Recommendations, which were recently shared with the University community, a member stated that the suggestion to close General College (GC) would have a serious impact on access to the University. Closing GC would shift the access and services formerly delivered by GC, to two-year colleges throughout the State. It is likely that GC does a better job of preparing students to enter other collegiate units than many community colleges. If this is the case, closing GC will actually make the access problem worse. It was further noted that the University of Minnesota is anomalously low in its college graduation rates compared to institutions in other states. Members agreed that access is a very important issue.

III). Kara Ferguson reported that she, Susan VonBank and Brian Wachutka met recently to discuss the questions raised by SCFP regarding the renewable energy resolution which the Social Concerns Committee endorsed last spring, and brought to the Senate in the fall of 2004. A decision was made to follow-up with the SCFP to ask them to provide detailed reasons why they disagree with SCC Renewable Energy Resolution. The reasons cited by SCFP were very broad.

Ms. Ferguson also noted that there was some confusion why this item went to the Senate for information versus action. The Renewable Energy Subcommittee thought it was being brought to the Senate for action.

Members of the Subcommittee on Renewable Energy would like to work with the SCFP on a mutually agreeable action resolution on renewable energy. According to Ms. Ferguson, the Social Concerns Renewable Energy Resolution was mirrored on the President's Sustainability and Energy Conservation Policy Work Group's recommendations and was developed in tandem with many of the same people involved.

Kara Ferguson stated that if any other SCC members are interested in joining the Social Concerns Renewable Energy Subcommittee, they should contact one of the current members, Kara Ferguson, Susan VonBank or Brian Wachutka.

Professor Heller recalled from last year that one of the objections to the Social Concerns resolution was that it was unclear in defining renewable energy sources. Professor Heller agreed to contact the chair of SCFP to try to identify a small group of each committee that could collaborate on drafting this resolution.

The SCC Renewable Energy Subcommittee will report back on their progress at the May 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

IV). A copy of Guidelines For Management & Faculty Working with Graduate Assistants<sup>1</sup> was distributed to members to facilitate the Committee's discussion on this topic. Questions that arose from these guidelines included:

- Are faculty working with graduate assistants considered management or employees? Who constitutes management?
- In the guidelines, what is meant by <sup>3</sup>You may not furnish any type of assistance to anyone campaigning for or against union representation<sup>2</sup>?

Renee Dempsey, Senate staff, shared information she learned from a conversation with Patti Dion in Employee Relations and Compensation. Ms. Dempsey noted that while faculty are able to express their opinions regarding collective bargaining, they should do so by indicating that it is their personal opinion. Employee Relations<sup>1</sup> is concerned that a graduate assistant may perceive that his/her job is in jeopardy if he/she and a faculty member hold opposing views on unionization. It was also noted that Deans, however, should not voice their opinions because they are in an administrative role. A member questioned whether there would be any repercussions for the Dean that violated guideline #4, which prohibits threatening or promising changes in working conditions based on an employee's position regarding unionization.

In terms of the Social Concerns Committee, Professor Heller noted that the issue before the Committee is one of free speech and the academic freedom to comment on what is occurring within the institution. Realizing the election is very soon, members, nevertheless, requested answers to the above questions.

V). Professor Heller reported that the Social Concerns Committee passed the Statement on Academic Freedom via email. This statement had also been brought to EAD for their endorsement, but EAD chose not to endorse this resolution as written. Professor Heller noted that he received an email from an EAD member expressing disagreement with the inclusion of the Larry Summers example in the statement. Julie Sweitzer, a member of both Social Concerns and EAD, explained that the EAD member that opposed the Larry Summers example was attempting to separate the academic freedom role of faculty from that of an administrator.

Members debated whether there is a difference between speaking as a faculty member versus speaking as an administrator. After much discussion, members decided not to change the original statement.

The resolution will be presented at the next Senate meeting.

VI). Other business:

- Professor Heller reported that he received an email regarding Mount Graham. He replied to the sender asking for clarification, but has received nothing to date.
- Professor Heller announced that the Senate Research Committee (SRC) will be discussing the Research Secrecy Policy at its next meeting on Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>. He asked if there were any Social Concerns members that would be interested in attending this meeting. Professor Heller, Professor Julie Pelletier and Professor Katherine Fennelly volunteered to do so. Then, at the next Social Concerns meeting, members of the SRC Research Secrecy Subcommittee will be present to discuss the topic further.

Professor David Fox also noted that earlier this year the Committee discussed drafting a policy dealing with the social impacts of research. Professor Fox agreed to prepare a draft to be discussed at the May 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

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

Renee Dempsey  
University Senate