

SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

Thursday, April 8, 1999

Dale Shephard Room

1:30PM

In these minutes:

Sweatshop Labor and the FLA, Renters Rights Forum, Proxy Resolutions

Present: Robin Brown (Chair), Jean Niemiec, Amelious Whyte, Margaret Kuchenreuther, George French, Mike Davey, Amy Mertl, Wesley Matson

Regrets: Lori Clark, Catherine Forseide-Hussain, Julie Sweitzer, Friedrich Srienc, Thomas Haakenson, Theodore Lewis, Sheila Warness, Joel Nelson

Absent: Sabeen Altaf, Nicholas Dehnert, Jenny Nate, Jennifer Watts

Guests: Bob Hicks, Director of Licenses & Athletic Properties; Mike Nelson, Institutional Relations

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

The Social Concerns Committee met at 1:30PM on Thursday, April 8, 1999 in the Dale Shephard Room of the Campus Club in Coffman Memorial Union on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota. The minutes from the March 11, 1999 committee meeting were approved as written.

SWEATSHOP LABOR.

Bob Hicks, Director of Licenses & Athletic Properties at the University of Minnesota, reported on a sweatshop labor issue that the University has been tracking for over a year. Mr. Hicks manages trademark licensing on campus and noted that his department works to protect, promote, and profit in the use of the University and its trademarks. There are four main issues that Mr. Hicks identified associated with the sweatshop labor issue: 1) wages, benefits, work hours, health & safety regulations, overtime, child labor laws; 2) issue of disclosure; 3) varying standards; and 4) enforcement.

The University of Minnesota does not currently have a Code of Conduct, but is not the only University to have none. Duke is in the process of signing on with the FLA's Code of Conduct; in fact, 17 universities have joined the efforts of the FLA to date. The question stands as to whether the University of Minnesota should become part of this effort. Professor Brown identified the committee's options to recommend that the University not act on this issue, to join in on the efforts of the FLA, or to write its own Code of Conduct regarding this issue. However, if the University wrote its own Code of Conduct, it would have no way to enforce it.

On the other hand, the American Council on Education urges colleges and universities to sign on to a new code aimed at stopping sweatshop manufacturing of collegiate apparel; the code would require extensive outside

monitoring, paid for in part by universities. The code, which addresses wages, benefits, work hours, health & safety regulations, overtime, and child labor laws, was written by the Fair Labor Association (FLA). The FLA is a nonprofit organization made up of representatives of apparel manufacturers, U.S. Department of Labor, consumer advocates, and labor, religious, and humanitarian groups, with backing from the White House.

The code requires internal and external monitors to inspect the factories. The internal monitoring component will be conducted on annual basis to evaluate the establishment of work place standards, relay them to the manufacturers, visit and audit, develop complaint procedures, and report back to the FLA. The external monitoring component will establish the percentage of plants to be monitored every two years, verify internal monitoring reports, conduct announced and unannounced visits, hold random employee interviews, and report back to the FLA.

When asked about the U of M's licensees' response to the efforts of the FLA, Mr. Hicks replied that because the FLA will not disclose names of plants, only regions, they are supportive. Athletic conferences have also alerted their members to this issue, but do not recommend any specific course of action.

The cost to join in the efforts of the FLA are 1% of the gross royalties to the institution. In essence, the U would be paying for the certification of internal and external monitors. When asked why the U of M licensees would join in with the efforts of the FLA, Mr. Hicks responded that it's good business and public relations. Concern was expressed about the FLA being involved in an incremental process and perhaps becoming stricter in its regulations in the future. However, to say that the FLA will have 100% compliance is not being pragmatic. The question is whether or not it is worse to do nothing. Overall, the FLA allows institutions some form of compliance that was not available one year ago.

Mr. Hicks recommended that committee members refer to one or all of the following three websites for more information on this issue:

- www.lchr.org/sweatshop
- www.acenet.edu/news
- www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/nosweat/partnership/compllist.htm

Any further questions can also be directed to him by e-mail at hicks001@umn.edu. Professor Brown thanked Mr. Hicks for his presentation and asked committee members to refer to the web sites and think further about the issue until the May meeting where a more detailed discussion about what the committee should recommend will take place.

RENTERS RIGHTS FORUM.

Mike Davey distributed a copy of the Minnesota Tenants Network Newsletter to committee members for their information. He proposed that the Social Concerns Committee arrange for a workshop where lawyers, tenants, and landlords can hold an informal discussion about housing issues. He will contact representatives from MSA and MMPRG, who are also working on the housing issue.

PROXY RESOLUTIONS.

A revised packet of proxy resolutions was distributed to committee members for their review. Professor Brown reported that the Social Concerns Committee has acted on all proxy resolutions that have not yet lapsed to date, and that the committee needs to act on the one remaining resolution from Oracle which is a proposal to increase and report on board diversity. However, since little information was available on the issue, and since a vote is not due until October, Professor Brown agreed to contact Sheila Warness, Asset Management, for more information.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- A discussion was held about the value of graduation and education versus winning and athletics in response to the cheating allegations against University basketball players. Concern was raised about the lack of faculty response about this issue to the public; Professor Brown will write to Professor Sara Evans, Chair of the Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC) for more information.
- A brief discussion was also held on animal rights issues versus the value of research.
- Continued discussion on animal rights v. research, athletics v. education, and sweatshop labor will take place at the May meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3PM.