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SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1999

3:00 - 4:30

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[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 represent the view or, nor are they binding on the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: George French (chair), Catherine Forseide-Hussain, Margaret Kuchenreuther, Joel Nelson, Wesley Matson, Jean Niemiec, Angelita Reyes, Mary Steinke, Amelious Whyte.

REGRETS: John Beatty, Robert Brown, Mike Davey, Julie Sweitzer.

ABSENT: Luis Ramos-Garcia, Sheila Warness.

1. INTRODUCTIONS

George French started the meeting at 3:06 and committee members took turns introducing themselves. He then read the committee charge, to illustrate its mission.

A committee member asked about the use of 'problems' in the charge to the committee. This implies that the committee is only concerned with problems and not issues that may or may not be problems in the future. The committee then debated changing the wording from 'problems' to 'issues' or 'concerns.' It was decided that dictionary definitions would be provided at the October meeting before any decisions are made.

2. UPDATES ON 1998-99 AGENDA ITEMS

SWEATSHOP LABOR - The General Counsel's Office said that an ad hoc committee has been formed to deal with the issue of the University purchasing apparel for resale or for use by its teams. The questions being asked include where these items come from, are they being produced in countries and/or factories that have fair labor practices, and how concerned the University should be with this issue.

Amelious Whyte said that he is a members of the ad hoc committee, which includes members from all campuses and from each group at the University. The committee is currently looking at the Fair Labor Association (FLA) which was set-up by different groups to look at monitoring sweatshops and setting standards. Many universities are deciding whether to sign-on with the FLA or setup their own monitoring system. The committee is now looking at planning a forum

on sweatshop practices to educate and receive feedback on what the University should do. Even though this issue is circulating through the universities, it is a very small part of the total picture.

George French added that the FLA does not really monitor the situation since it is run by the companies. On the other hand, the University can not travel to every factory to monitor conditions.

Amelious Whyte said that the University needs to determine what standards to use. Also, if foreign producers are monitored, would local-based ones be subject to the same scrutiny?

Q: Why has this discussion been restricted to apparel?

A: This has been in response to students at other campuses. A broader view has not been discussed yet, since the FLA is only concerned with apparel.

Q: How do major companies handle these issues?

A: Some of this information would show up in the proxy resolutions that the committee looks at each year. Also, some companies seem to be more at fault, such as Nike, than others, such as Levi-Strauss.

George French said that he would monitor the activities of the ad hoc committee, support a campus forum, and report back to this committee next month.

BASKETBALL ALLEGATIONS - An outside investigation continues, and a report is due this fall. After, the Twin Cities Campus Assembly will meet to discuss it. A Student Academic Integrity Subcommittee has been formed and is chaired by Regents' Professor Tom Clayton. Any other actions to be taken will be handled directly by the Assembly Steering Committee, therefore this committee should see little from this issue. A forum will also be held this fall once the report is issued and before any decisions are finalized

Another member then asked what the role of the committee is, since for most of the issues on the agenda today, another subcommittee or task force has been established to deal with them. Should the committee be looking into these issues as well?

The committee discussed this issue and made the following comments:

- Possible explanation for task forces/subcommittees might be a need for expertise with an issue
- Committee generally keeps nose to the ground to find issues instead of them being brought
- Over time, committee can develop expertise in addressing issues
- If other expertise needed, individuals could be invited to committee meetings
- If the administration does not need this committee to act as its conscience, then a new role needs to be developed

- Stock proxy resolutions have been designated the business of the committee
- Are any of the current issues appropriate for this committee to be dealing with?
- Community at-large has an opinion on the allegations
- Faculty have been warned not to comment on the allegations of academic integrity
- Would preliminary reports regarding NIH funds be brought to this committee?
- Internal auditors will be issuing a report to the President

ANIMAL RIGHTS/LABORATORY VANDALISM - The Faculty Consultative Committee statement, in support of laboratory use of animals under set guidelines and denouncing the destruction of labs, was approved by the Faculty Senate in May and then sent to the administration. This committee also wrote a letter in support of this statement.

RENTER'S RIGHTS - Last spring a forum was held with 60 students attending. A legal advisory from Housing Services discussed renter's rights, while a city official discussed affordable housing in the Twin Cities area, especially for students.

The committee decided to include this issue on the October agenda to see if Mike Davey, an alumni member, had any more to add. It was also noted this issue includes affordable housing as well as renters' rights.

Q: Has the Twin Cities Campus housing shortage been solved with new construction?

A: No. Even with the addition of University Village, a new Territorial Hall addition, and the new building behind Coffman Union, the University will still be behind what is needed. The University will continue to work with private companies to build housing options, and then make arrangements for University students to live there, since the University has no more land for developing. Unlike last year, there are no students in hotels, although some still live in lounges. Territorial Hall additions will likely be the last residence hall style additions to campus. All new buildings, including those behind Coffman Union, will be apartment style housing.

A member commented that in Morris a large percentage of the upper class live off-campus, since there are few apartment style dorms available, and make-up 1/3 of the city. The mayor has been proactive in pushing housing issues, in response to complaints from students and others. A new city ordinance has been passed that requires all landlords to register their properties with the city. Now, property inspections will be done once every four years by an independent inspection firm to make sure that they meet minimum health and safety standards. There has been some resistance from landlords, but it has been a victory for students in Morris.

3. 1999-00 AGENDA ITEMS

The committee suggested the following issues be discussed by the committee this year:

- Stockholder proxy resolutions
- Sweatshop Labor - an update will be provided from the Task Force meeting and then the committee can decide what should be done next

- Renter's Rights
- University's response to Alcohol on Campus - a committee has been formed to make a recommendation about revising the Regents' Alcohol Policy regarding the procedure to receive permission to serve alcohol on campus. Roughly 800 exemptions are granted each year by the President's Office. Coffman would like to serve alcohol when they reopen, but this is not in the final plans. Northrop was granted a license to sell alcohol, but the Regents' still have to grant permission. At the New Student Convocation, both President Yudof and Vice President McKinley Boston took a serious turn when discussing this issue with students. When faculty get permission to serve alcohol on campus, this does not set a good example for the students. Should campus just be dry, without any exceptions? What are the liability issues for granted exceptions? Currently, no one knows what the consequences are for not following the rules.
- Campus Safety - the committee could meet with the new Police Chief
- University Purchasing Practices/Food Services - Starbuck's Coffee has recently been added to campus. The coffee beans its uses are is not ethically grown since the company is destroying the rainforest by cutting down the trees to grow its coffee beans in the sun, or under metal roofs. This has lead to a decrease in neo-tropical songbirds and a loss in small farmers growing crops under the rainforest canopy. Small cooperative enterprises can be used for coffee production since they do not destroy the environment and they pay a fare wage to the workers. This issue is a piece of the overall purchasing practices of the University, along with apparel and other items. A letter was also sent to the President to ask that the committee be participants in whatever future agreements the University signs with outside vendors.

A member asked if an e-mail should be sent or an ad should be placed in the *Minnesota Daily* asking for issues to be brought forward from faculty, staff, and students.

Another member reminded the committee about the activists that attended the meetings during the Burmese discussions and tried to force their opinions on the committee. Care should be taken when contacting any campus newspapers.

George French said that he would talk to the *Minnesota Daily* about doing an article on the committee or submitting an editorial before placing an ad. He then thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 4:42 p.m.

Rebecca Hippert
University Senate