

[In these minutes: 1. Discussion of the University Alcohol Policy, 2. Update on Affordable Housing, 3. Update on Sweatshop Labor Task Force]

SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1999

3:00 - 4:30

346 CMU

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

PRESENT: George French (chair), Mike Davey, Margaret Kuchenreuther, Joel Nelson, Wesley Matson, Jean Niemiec, Amelious Whyte, Jennifer Young.

REGRETS: John Beatty, Robert Brown, Catherine Forseide-Hussain, Luis Ramos-Garcia, Mary Steinke, Julie Sweitzer, Sheila Warness.

ABSENT: Meghan McCauley, Angelita Reyes, Stephanie Root.

GUESTS: Drew Hempel.

1. DISCUSSION OF THE UNIVERSITY ALCOHOL POLICY

Amelious Whyte began by distributing the current Regents policy and exemption form, and a draft exemption form. The current Regents policy states that alcohol cannot be served on campus without permission from the President. Standing exemptions to this rule are the Campus Club, the club rooms at Williams and Mariucci Arenas, and certain residence halls if all roommates are of age. In addition, 700-800 exemptions are given out each year.

He said that the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Committee (ATOD) formed a task force, of which he is a member, to look at revising the policy and application. The draft proposal calls for alcohol to be served, but under specific circumstances, such as the form being sent in 15 days before an event. If this does not happen, or if the form is filled out incorrectly, the exemption would not be granted. Compliance checks were also considered, but would require a full-time officer to police events.

Other schools have different policies. Some prohibit alcohol in classrooms, but how would that be defined for this campus. Another requires dining services to provide all catering services, including alcohol. Some schools have opted to be dry. Prohibiting staff drinking during the day or before 4:30 p.m. was also discussed. Since non-University events are also part of the total exemptions, there needs to be one expectation for all events on University grounds.

He said that he would appreciate feedback from this committee since the task force will be meeting next month to create a final version. This version will then go to the full ATOD Committee, the President, and then the Regents.

Q: Who are the members of the subcommittee?

A: Membership includes representatives from the President's Office, Public Health faculty, students, University Police, student service leaders, the Hennepin County Health Deputy, and himself.

Q: Is this an ad hoc committee?

A: The full ATOD was formed five years ago, but is now required by federal law. The task force was created by the full committee.

Q: Do these changes constitute a more comprehensive policy with additional responsibilities?

A: Yes since it will uniformly apply expectations across campus and include legal requirements.

Q: How careful is the current application review process?

A: Not very careful. Most applications are approved. Those that are denied are usually from student groups wanting to use student fee funds to purchase alcohol. Some applications are turned in on the day of the event; some even after the fact. Consequences are also not apparent.

Q: Why can hard liquor be served?

A: This issue has not come up, but there is no difference between hard liquor and a beer. The question was raised as to why the University needs to serve alcohol at all.

Q: Kegs are much better for the environment than bottles and cans. Why are they not allowed to be used?

A: The policy states that distribution needs to be monitored to prevent someone from excessive drinking. Kegs could be considered as long as there is still a designated server.

A committee member said that drinking is not the problem, instead it is drinking to excess. Young adults are exposed mostly to their friends drinking habits at parties. By serving alcohol on campus, students see faculty and staff drinking responsibly.

George French then said that at Morris alcohol is allowed in all residence halls, while at Crookston and Duluth the residence halls are all dry. For the Twin Cities, a few prohibit but the majority allow alcohol as long as all roommates are at least 21 years of age.

It was then decided that this issue would be brought back at the December meeting.

2. UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mike Davey said that he met with MPIRG to discuss housing needs for the Twin Cities. MPIRG reported that housing is being built but not at an affordable price. They then discussed developing a forum to take place in late spring on this topic.

This topic especially pertains to students since so many of them graduate with a very high debt, a part of which can be attributed to rising housing costs. Current figures show that a dorm room costs approximately \$550 per month while the new University Village housing is close to \$700 per month. These amounts are too much for many students who already work full-time to pay for tuition, books, and food.

Q: Is housing state supported?

A: No, it has to generate its own revenue. High property taxes, which prevent many landlords from making improvements, do not pertain to the University. Dorm rates are comparable to those around the Big Ten, and offer more amenities than living off campus.

A committee member said that affordable housing for college students is a problem because they are not the group targeted by lawmakers. When housing is discussed, it is in terms of families, not single students. Primarily this is because students are transient and do not vote enough in any one district to be seriously considered.

Mike Davey concluded that there are approximately 16,000 homeless people per night in Minnesota, 3,000 of which are in Hennepin County. Students need to put pressure on the community to develop affordable housing alternatives.

3. UPDATE ON SWEATSHOP LABOR TASK FORCE

Professor French started by saying that the Forum date was originally set for sometime in November, but was delayed due to problems with a grant request. It has been rescheduled for December 9 and he has been asked to serve as moderator for part of the Forum. The format will be a description of sweatshop labor and the organizations involved followed by presentations from the speakers and then questions from the audience. Based on the information he has read, the videos he has viewed, and the people he has talked to, Professor French has serious questions about the wisdom of the University aligning itself with the FLA as of today's meeting, but everyone should be allowed to listen to the information and make up their own minds.

Drew Hempel stated that Brown University has joined the Workers' Rights Consortium, a group which has been endorsed by the whistleblowers themselves. MSA, at their last meeting, approved a resolution that endorsed the University's affiliation with the Consortium. This committee's voice needs to be heard on this issue so that it can be presented at the Forum.

The committee then debated what action should be taken and made the following comments:

- This committee should not endorse a resolution from another organization

- The Forum needs to take place to disseminate information
- The committee needs more information on the Workers' Rights Consortium before it can take a stand
- Any action by the committee should wait until after the Forum
- The University should not join any group just because there are no other alternatives
- Should a letter be sent to the General Counsel's Office asking them to make sure that the Forum is fair and balanced?
- Should the committee draft a resolution asking the administration to wait on a decision until after this committee has a chance to review all materials and make a decision?

It was decided that the committee would move its December meeting to the 16th, to allow members to attend the Forum on the 9th and then come to the meeting ready to make a decision.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

A committee member asked what was happening with the basketball allegations.

Professor French said that the Consultative Committee was looking into the matter, and that the President would be releasing his report later this month.

With no further business, he then thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Rebecca Hippert
University Senate