

[In these minutes: 1. Committee Charge, 2. Renter's Rights/Affordable Housing, 3. Task Force on Sweatshop Labor]

SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1999

3:00 - 4:30

238 MORRILL HALL

[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), John Beatty, Robert Brown, Mike Davey, Wesley Matson, Luis Ramos-Garcia, Mary Steinke, Jennifer Young.

REGRETS: Catherine Forseide-Hussain, Margaret Kuchenreuther, Meghan McCauley, Joel Nelson, Jean Niemiec, Angelita Reyes, Julie Sweitzer, Amelious Whyte.

ABSENT: Stephanie Root, Sheila Warness

GUESTS: Drew Hempel, Nancy Hoyt.

George French started the meeting and introductions were done again since there were so many new people. Also, since the minutes had not been sent to committee members, he read through them to tell everyone what had been discussed in September.

1. COMMITTEE CHARGE

Professor French stated that the word 'problems' used in the committee charge seemed to carry negative connotations and it suggested that this be changed to issues or concerns. He then asked the committee for their opinions.

The committee gave the following remarks:

- There is very little difference between the words being debated
- Issue seems to signify that a decision will be reached, which is not something that the committee is always able to do
- Something that is an issue for one person might be a problem for another
- The committee can take a stand by recommending internal policy changes or resolutions, which then need to be passed by the Senate and perhaps the Regents.

Following the discussion, Professor French asked if anyone wanted to state a motion to change the charge. Hearing no motion, he moved on to the next agenda item, but reminded committee members that if they wanted to bring this back in the future, he would be willing to place it on the agenda.

2. 1999-00 AGENDA ITEMS

George French said that the University Purchasing Policy would not be discussed today and that the University Alcohol Policy would be held until the November meeting when Amelious Whyte would be present to talk with the committee.

He then asked Mike Davey to update the committee on Renter's Rights and Affordable Housing in the Twin Cities.

Mike Davey began by saying that November 14-20 is National Homelessness Awareness Week, and he is trying to organize an event at the University during this period. He said that many people have misperceptions of homeless people and by having a forum or discussion on this topic, he hopes to change this image. He will also be working on another project scheduled for the spring.

Mike reported that there are roughly 16,000 homeless people per night in Minnesota, of which half are children. He hopes to tell people about the social impacts of these figures, and asked the committee for its support in this effort.

Q: Are University students a problem when discussing homelessness? Is it because of a lack of affordable housing?

A: University students share the city so that can be a part of the problem or part of the solution. Homeless people live at the University but they are usually not the ones responsible for campus crimes. Many homeless people also work full-time, thereby contributing to the state and federal government, yet do not earn enough to be able to afford housing. This happens to many University students who end up living with friends, sometimes just for small periods of time, because they cannot afford tuition and rent.

It was suggested that Mike talk to CURA or the Urban Studies department about their planned activities during the week in November, since there would not be enough time for the committee to participate in this event. Then, a proposal could be brought back in the winter for the committee to consider endorsing during the spring event.

3. UPDATE ON SWEATSHOP LABOR TASK FORCE

George French began by summarizing that a task force has been established last spring and then met over the summer. Its charge is to determine what should be the University's response to sweatshop labor. The three choices are to ignore the problem, align the University with the FLA, or create a unique response. For the meeting today, he has invited Drew Hempel, a student member of the Task Force, and Nancy Hoyt, from the General Counsel's Office. He also asked

the committee if they would like to watch a video, either or Mickey Mouse goes to Haiti or Zoned for Slavery.

A member then said that last year the committee sent a letter to the President in regards to the University's partnerships with public companies. The letter asked for the committee to be involved before any decisions are made. There was no response to the letter.

Another member suggested that a second letter be sent, but to more people than just the President.

Drew Hempel said that a private company, hoping to employ University students, had been walking into classes on campus today. This seems to go against the mission of the University.

George French said that this is one of the effects of partnerships with private companies. While the University is a public institution, it is here to educate students and therefore classrooms should be considered private areas. If private companies want to recruit students, then it should be done outside or at the student union.

Drew Hempel stated that is frustrating to be a member of the Task Force. He explained that the FLA was created, by the sweatshops, in response to the sweatshop workers' situation being exposed. Therefore, whatever decisions are made by the FLA, the sweatshops have veto power over them. The FLA also does not require a living wage be paid to workers. He said that he has more literatures on sweatshops which should be shown to the Task Force members as well as the University community.

Q: What happens if the University joins the FLA?

A: A small amount in dues would be paid and then the FLA would monitor sweatshops for the University. There does not seem to be any sentiment on the Task Force to join the FLA since it is just a public relations lobbying group that was created to diffuse the public's view, without making any real changes in conditions.

Nancy Hoyt joined the meeting, in place of Mark Rotenberg, and distributed a membership list for the Task Force. She said that a forum is being planned for an evening in the beginning of November. The forum will be for three hours at the Humphrey Institute. The President will provide comments and then the definition of a sweatshop, a history of responses, and University licensing information will be presented. In addition, 5 - 6 representatives will be invited, from companies such as Nike and universities which have (Duke or Notre Dame) and have not joined the FLA. Information tables will also be provided in the lobby for groups to distribute additional materials. Links will be provided for all the campuses so that people from around the state can give their opinion on what the University should do. The Task Force will then use this information in making its recommendations to the President.

Q: What did the University of Wisconsin decide to do?

A: They have given a limited endorsement to the FLA. In addition, they will be holding a symposium to research the issue. They are one of 120 schools which have chosen to join the FLA.

In closing, George French that the FLA is an organization with momentum and the University needs to take a stand. He then thanked all members and guests for coming, invited those interested to stay and watch a video, and adjourned the meeting at 4:32 p.m.

Rebecca Hippert
University Senate