

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS
MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 25, 2010
Morrill Hall Room 238A

[In these minutes: academic civility presentation and resolution; floating holiday resolution; equity during budget cuts resolution]

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

PRESENT: Timothy Sheldon (Chair), Ahmed Heikal, Jenny Weber, Kim Robien, Rebecca Von Dissen, David Golden, Susan Cable Morrison, Michael O'Day, Joseph Marchesani, Maria Hanratty, Amelious Whyte

REGRETS: Bob Morrison, Elizabeth Shay, Michael Sommers, Kaari Nelson, Marynel Ryan Van Zee, Marissa Wagar

ABSENT: Lisa Pogoff, Sandra Kresbach,

GUESTS: Jan Morse, Director of the Student Conflict Resolution Center; Carolyn Chalmers, Director of the Office for Conflict Resolution

Timothy Sheldon called the meeting to order, and welcomed those present. He asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

Academic Civility Resolution

Mr. Sheldon introduced the Equity Access & Diversity (EAD) Committee's resolution "Supporting the Efforts of the Work Group Promoting Academic Civility," and welcomed Jan Morse, Director of the Student Conflict Resolution Center (SCRC) and Carolyn Chalmers, Director of the Office for Conflict Resolution (OCR). Ms. Morse and Ms. Chalmers provided background information on the Workgroup Promoting Academic Civility (Workgroup). In 2007, the SCRC conducted a survey of all UMN-TC graduate students regarding the prevalence, manifestations, and effects of academic incivility. The survey also explored barriers to seeking assistance and interventions when the behavior was reported. The survey found significant experiences of academic harassment. One-third of the 2000 respondents were the target of or witnessed academic harassment defined as hostile, offensive, or intimidating behavior that interfered with their ability to work. Half of graduate students who were targets indicated they were thinking of leaving their programs. In response, the Workgroup was established to develop a model to address academic incivility on campus. In 2008-09 the Workgroup created:

- Material to assist students dealing with academic harassment.
- Reference and advising guides for faculty including resources for additional information
- Information to assist department chairs

These documents are on the SCRC website. <http://www.sos.umn.edu/>

Mr. Sheldon asked if most of the uncivil behavior is between faculty members and students? Ms. Morse responded that most instances are between faculty (other than advisors) and students, but it is also student to student, and advisor to student.

Joseph Marchesani asked how many members of the Workgroup are tenured faculty? Ms. Morse responded that they try to have a mix of administrators and faculty. Faculty make-up about half-a-dozen members of the group.

Ms. Chalmers clarified the difference between the Office for Conflict Resolution and the Office of Student Conflict Resolution. OCR handles employment matters and SCRC deals with academic matters. There is, however, overlap in the area of graduate students.

Both offices realized there was a systemic problem. So, Ms. Morse organized the Workgroup to develop simple tools to assist faculty and students. She went on to note that although academic harassment is often a hidden issue there is growing awareness of across the country.

Professor Maria Hanratty asked Ms. Morse to provide some examples of the most prevalent types of behavior. Ms. Morse cited the following behaviors:

- Shifting the focus from the work to interpersonal relationships.
- Sharing private information about students.
- Pitting individuals against one another.
- Making people on-edge and uncomfortable.
- Not reading dissertations or drafts and being repeatedly unavailable (controlling).

Amelious Whyte asked what is the distinction between being controlling and just being “busy?” Ms. Morse responded that it is a question of context and pattern of behavior. Susan Cable Morrison noted that she manages programs for graduate students, and she has received calls from a number of graduate students who are terrified to talk to their advisors (who are often their employers) because they are concerned it would affect their career.

Ms. Morse stated that the behavior is often strategic. But, once it is made clear that the behavior cannot continue, it can be changed quickly. The idea is to bring the issue out into the open. It is important for the community to recognize how disruptive academic incivility can be, and that it can trickle down from faculty to students. The issue exists in every department and at every level.

Mr. Sheldon asked Ms. Morse to discuss the purpose of the resolution being considered by the committee. She stated it is important for the University to attract and retain top graduate students, incivility costs the University, and it must take responsibility for addressing the problem.

Professor Ahmed Heikal commented that sometimes students behave badly because of an underlying issue, and asked if there was a place for students to receive assistance. Ms. Morse stated the SCRC is a resource for students. It can provide them with information on how to talk about issues early and civilly, and provide tips for difficult conversations before students are uncivil.

Several committee members asked if there were similar initiatives for undergraduates. Ms. Morse explained that the SCRC assists 700 students per year, one-third are graduate students and two-thirds are undergraduates. Academic incivility has not been as prevalent for undergraduates, but it is the number one issue for graduate students. The committee expressed concern that undergraduates are not sufficiently included in the resolution. Several committee members also voiced concern for international graduate students. It was noted that one-third of graduate students are international students. These students may have cultural barriers to recognizing, and seeking help for academic hostility. Ms. Morse acknowledged the particular difficulties for international graduate students.

Mr. Whyte asked how graduate students are receiving information about the Work Group and resources for addressing academic incivility. Ms. Morse stated a presentation was made at the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, a Council of Graduate Students representative is a member of the Work Group, there have been workshops for graduate students and faculty, and presentations at both sessions of the Graduate School orientation for all incoming graduate students.

Mr. Sheldon noted that expectations for graduate students are uneven across the departments and colleges. Ms. Morse responded that the Work Group had produced some materials to assist with this such as the “SUCCESS for Faculty Mentors and Graduate/Professional Students” document, department orientation materials, and an advisor evaluation.

Mr. Sheldon summarized the action items in the resolution. Ms. Morse commented that the Work Group is seeking assistance in gathering information from the surveys and developing on line materials. Ms. Chalmers noted that the emphasis of the Work Group is on a systemic change to create a culture of mutual respect.

The committee voted to support the resolution with a friendly amendment encouraging the Work Group to address academic incivility in the professional schools and with undergraduates.

Personal Holiday Resolution

Mr. Sheldon gave a short explanation of the Personal Holiday Resolution to the new members of the committee, and explained the need to add a “comment” to the resolution before it proceeded to the University Senate floor. Ms. Cable Morrison asked if Vice President of Human Resources Carol Carrier was aware of the resolution, and Mr. Sheldon explained that her Chief of Staff, Joe Kelly, had been present at the committee’s

last meeting. A motion was made to accept the resolution with the addition of the “comment,” and the motion passed.

Equity During Budget Cuts Resolution

Mr. Sheldon provided the committee with copies of the EAD Committee’s Equity During Budget Cuts Resolution, provided a brief summary of it, and informed the committee that EAD was seeking support of this resolution. Significant discussion followed.

Professor Hanratty stated that some pay scale differentials are justifiable, but overall she agreed with the idea of a progressive scale as set out in the resolution. Mr. Whyte expressed concern that the comment section of the resolution assumes that individual with lower salaries are less well off. He stated it is difficult to know what individual’s circumstances are, and what they choose to do with their salaries.

Professor Hanratty felt there was incongruity in the document because wage cuts were discussed in the body of the document and job protection is mentioned in the comment section. She suggested that the body of the resolution should also include language about job protection. Additional questions were also asked about:

- The impact of the resolution on bargaining unit employees,
- The logistics of implementing the resolution,
- Whether OHR had been consulted,
- The breadth of the resolution,
- The impact on individual departments.

The committee agreed that the resolution brought up important social issues, and several committee members suggested it would be beneficial to have a campus-wide conversation about how to handle the University’s budget crises. David Golden indicated he would like to hear the opinions of other administrators on the imposition of salary reductions on a sliding scale.

The committee decided not to take any action on the resolution at this time. Mr. Sheldon asked committee members to send him any specific questions they had about the resolution, and stated that he would convey them to Professor Irene Duranczyk, chair of EAD. He also suggested that next month the committee should consider how to broaden participation in the conversation, and the possibility of sponsoring a forum.

Hearing no further business, Mr. Sheldon adjourned the meeting.

Dawn Zugay
University Senate Office