



# OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

## OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

Tuesday, 14 May 1991  
Ninth Meeting

### *MINUTES*

Senators Present: Appleton, Bertocci, Braunstein, Briggs-Bunting, Cass, Dahlgren, Eberwein, Eckart, Frankie, Garcia, Griggs, Hamilton, Hartman, Heintz, Kazarian, Kleckner, Mabee, Mittelstaedt, Pettengill, Salomon, Theisen, Williamson, Witt.

Senators Absent: Abiko, Beehler, Berven, Bricker, Cardimen, Champagne, Chipman, Cowlshaw, Dillon, Eliezer, Fish, Grossman, Herman, Hovanesian, Lederer, Liboff, Long, Meehan, Mili, Miller, Olson, Pine, Reddy, Rosen, Schieber, Schimmelman, Schwartz, Stern, Stevens, Tracy, Tripp, Urice, Walter, Wedekind, Weng, Williams, Winkler, Wood, Zenas.

#### Summary of Actions:

1. Minutes of 18 April 1991 (Briggs-Bunting; Pettengill). Approved.
2. Report from the Ad hoc subcommittee on Conference Center Planning (Pettengill).

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order at 3:09 p.m., noting with relief that the Senate constitution lifts the usual quorum rules for meetings held outside the traditional academic governance year. Observing the preference of senators for seats on the right-hand side of the room, he considered introducing ushers in the fall to balance seating. The only housekeeping business undertaken was consideration of the minutes of 18 April 1991. These, having been duly moved by Ms. Briggs-Bunting and seconded by Mr. Pettengill, were approved without discussion. Ms. Briggs-Bunting, however, called for correction of spelling for "Ninth Meeting" on the day's agenda. (Note: Upon reviewing records, the Secretary finds that the Senate has not as yet considered the minutes of 11 April 1991, which members are encouraged to review before the final meeting of this body.)

This extra meeting having been called to allow the Senate a chance to respond to the report of its Ad hoc Subcommittee on Conference Center Planning, Mr. Kleckner turned quickly to that solitary item of scheduled business. He sketched in a brief history of the subcommittee's appointment and charge and mentioned that the report had reached his office later than expected and then gotten held up in campus mail so that it wended its way to faculty mailboxes only late the previous afternoon. He then turned to Mr. Pettengill to speak for the subcommittee.

Mr. Pettengill described the report as a statement coming from him rather than from the full committee, which has not had a chance to meet to approve or modify it. He indicated that it reviewed the issues the Senate had charged his group to consider but included no specific recommendations from that body. At this point, he invited Senate discussion or questioning

about this work in progress.

Mr. Bertocci, desirous to understand the Senate's role, probed to find out exactly what the parent body was expected to do that day. Were senators, he wondered, being asked to comment on an early draft in order to advise the subcommittee as it formulated specific recommendations it might wish to present at the Senate's next meeting? Mr. Pettengill understood the matter in that light, though he pointed out that he could not say with certitude whether his subcommittee would have any specific recommendations to bring forward. He did expect it to offer a resolution of some sort. Mr. Kleckner thought that the subcommittee would respond to general yeas or nays arising from the Senate about items within Mr. Pettengill's report.

Mr. Williamson declared that he would find it easier to respond if provided with specific numbers. He would like to know how much business a conference center would have to do to break even, how many rooms it would provide, and how substantially it might relieve current pressure on classroom availability. Mr. Pettengill responded by citing relevant numbers from the feasibility study, which projects numbers typical of university-associated conference centers. He doubted that such a facility would prove useful in providing classrooms for semester-long courses although it might help out with occasional mini-courses that could be concentrated intensively in a few days. Pamela Marin, Director of Continuing Education and a member of the subcommittee, pointed out that Continuing Education does not at present use substantial numbers of campus classrooms during the week. When Mr. Williamson pressed for specific information on the projected rate structure, Mr. Pettengill doubted that the subcommittee's report would include detailed projections. Exact rates remain entirely up in the air. His group envisages a sliding scale, however, with campus users (including Continuing Education) allowed the lowest rate. The track records of similar conference centers indicate that the facility should be able to break even if campus use accounts for 20-40% of its business.

Ms. Briggs-Bunting enjoined the Pettengill committee to look carefully at the comparative prospects of residential and non-residential centers. She also advised taking a closer look at competition within this area. She would like somebody to examine the consultant's role in conducting the original feasibility study. Having been told that this group has never advised against building a conference center, she wondered whether it might have an interest in eventual construction and operation. Mr. Pettengill understood that the consultant's role was entirely a one-shot activity; actual decisions, he reminded the Senate, would depend on the informed judgment of whatever third party might be interested in building and operating such a center. Ms. Garcia, now actively involved in preparing for the fall meeting at Oakland University of the Michigan College English Association, reinforced Ms. Briggs-Bunting's point about local competition by reporting on meetings of MCEA officers with representatives of local hotels. When examining facilities and comparing rates, she was pleasantly surprised by the exceptionally helpful response from the new Hilton. Forewarned by the troubles of many hotel and motel chains that opened facilities near our campus in expectation of more business from the Technical Park than has yet developed, she judged it "absolutely idiotic" for a university like ours even to think about attempting to accomplish in the public sector what the private sector cannot do profitably in this area. Ms. Briggs-Bunting then pressed to know how a conference center would affect Meadow Brook Hall, which must continue to pay its own way, and how it would respond to changes in technology that make teleconferencing increasingly important in this period of restricted business travel.

Mr. Kleckner attempted to distinguish between the kinds of questions the Pettengill subcommittee should be expected to answer and those that must be grappled with in detail by whatever group might actually propose to build and operate a conference center on our campus. Some of the details demanded by senators seemed to him premature, although they would have to be provided later. He did not think the subcommittee should attempt to conduct a full feasibility study, anticipating work that would surely be done eventually by any group that actually commits money to this project. What the Senate should expect from its subcommittee is careful reflection on such a center's likely impact on the university itself and on safeguards to protect us.

Mr. Bertocci expanded on this point by pronouncing certain areas of inquiry as legitimate concerns for the Senate. For example, he averred, it is proper for the Senate to be concerned that the university not go broke. At least two minimal concerns seemed to him particularly important: that the university community be assured of reasonable access to any such conference center and that there be a proper fit between that facility's business and the university's role and mission.

Mr. Kleckner then anticipated the calendar on which decisions about a conference center might be made. He guessed that the fastest timetable would have the matter considered by the Board during the summer. By the end of this summer, it is possible that the Board might find itself disposed to seek proposals, although no actual call could go out until sometime in the fall. On that basis, he thought the Senate would have additional opportunities to respond to Mr. Bertocci's concerns as well as opportunity at some future time to react to specific proposals. This information led Ms. Garcia to inquire exactly what the Board might be considering over the summer. Would it be dealing with the feasibility study? The subcommittee's report? She felt dizzied by the projected speed of developments on this construction project in contrast to the pace of action on the science building. Mr. Kleckner responded that the difference stemmed from funding sources. The university must rely on the state to put up the science building on its own schedule, whereas a private concern would build the conference center. One firm has already shown some interest. He indicated that the Board could study the subcommittee's report for evidence of needs that should be incorporated into any request for proposals. The contribution of this Senate process would be to establish conditions. He warned, however, on the basis of recent experience in exploring external management for the Music Festival, that we may yet find that nobody is interested in taking on the project -- or not, at least, within the specifications the university sees fit to establish.

Ms. Theisen then introduced a new line of questioning by asking whether the matter of a second golf course had been considered. She wondered whether that might be another issue altogether. Mr. Kleckner indicated that the matters might or might not be linked. The feasibility study mentioned access to a golf course as highly attractive to projected conference center users, and there are two means of providing that: either by building a second course or by providing access to the present one for this new population. Ms. Briggs-Bunting had heard that a private donor had been found to give the money for a second golf course. She wondered whether the university could put some sort of conditions on acceptance of gifts that requires that a certain amount be devoted to academic purposes such as scholarships and library support. Mr. Kleckner, who knew of no such donor, believed that the university could set such stipulations on gifts.

Mr. Griggs then reverted to the question of whether a conference center should be residential

or not. He asked what other university- affiliated centers the subcommittee had studied. Messrs. Pettengill and Kleckner then filled in information about such facilities in Michigan, some of them residential and others not. Western's is non-residential; Eastern's is a two-faceted enterprise, with a university-run conference center operating in conjunction with a Radisson Hotel in which the university has no money invested. The conference business is adequate there, but the hotel has had to advertise widely to attract recreational business. Mr. Braunstein, attempting to bring the discussion to some sort of useful closure, said he did not believe the Senate should be conducting its own feasibility study although it should know for certain that a solid one had been done before commitments are made. Yet this body has a proper concern with ensuring that any such center on our campus support the university's goals and mission. He encouraged the Pettengill committee to focus its attention on those matters. When Mr. Kleckner asked whether senators wanted the committee to look into additional matters, no suggestions came forward immediately. Mr. Williamson later inquired whether the subcommittee had looked at any model of a university working with an externally owned and operated conference center in which the academic institution preserved control over use and access without incurring fiscal responsibility. He wondered whether we have any standard against which to measure whatever proposals may arrive. Mr. Pettengill acknowledged that his colleagues had found no model exactly like that proposed for Oakland. It appeared to him that universities generally build non-residential conference facilities for themselves and that residential ones are usually owned by outside developers. Mr. Kleckner pointed out several models in Michigan, ranging all the way downward from the Kellogg Center at Michigan State, which the university owns and operates as part of an academic program.

Several people wondered about the impact of the Senate's advice, with Ms. Eckart asking whether -- in responding to the Pettengill report -- the body might be understood to be supporting the idea of a conference center. She asked clarification of what the report would call upon this group to do. Mr. Pettengill replied that the subcommittee might or might not have a specific recommendation for the Senate to approve or reject the idea of a conference center. He could not project its disposition but assured senators that the subcommittee would address the parent body's concerns. Ms. Eckart wanted to know whether the Senate would be discussing the feasibility study or guidelines for requests for proposals. Mr. Pettengill emphasized the latter, projecting that any interested third party would conduct its own feasibility study in response to an RFP published by our Board. When Ms. Garcia asked whether the subcommittee's final report would incorporate responses to concerns raised at this meeting, Mr. Pettengill promised to include as many as possible. Ms. Briggs-Bunting warned that she did not want the Senate put in the spot of seeming to make a tacit recommendation. She wished to vote an explicit yes or no on the idea of a conference center. Mr. Kleckner agreed that the Senate could, in fact, vote no; if it did so, however, he advised it to make its reasoning clear. It could also stipulate that, if there should be a conference center, certain safeguards must be incorporated into any proposal. He supposed that the Steering Committee would attempt to draft some sort of resolution for Senate vote based upon the subcommittee's report.

The final matter to discuss with respect to the subcommittee's report involved scheduling of another Senate meeting to respond to whatever recommendations the Pettengill committee might introduce. Mr. Kleckner asked its chair whether his committee's report and recommendations could be prepared and circulated in time for a 28 May meeting. Mr. Pettengill found that deadline tight, especially in view of Ms. Briggs-Bunting's point that the Memorial Day weekend observance would delay mail delivery. Mr. Kleckner, seeing nothing magical about the date projected on the Senate agenda, wanted to make sure that discussion took place before people disappeared after Commencement. Indicating that his subcommittee

would be meeting Thursday, May 16, Mr. Pettengill thought that Thursday, the 30th, should be a relatively comfortable date. Ms. Hamilton objected that the annual day-long Rhetoric seminar was scheduled for that day, but alternative dates presented other obstacles. The Senate will convene again on the afternoon of Thursday, May 30.

With no business introduced for the good of the order, Mr. Kleckner proceeded to report developments in Lansing, where budget deliberations continue. Oakland University has presented its case in both House and Senate hearings, and the appropriate House subcommittee has now reported its recommendations. Unsuccessful in his attempt to find chalk for depicting the labyrinthine committee structure through which budget proposals work their way in both houses, Mr. Kleckner settled for explaining what the picture looks like currently. The Senate is probably disposed to support the governor's recommendation of a 4% across-the-board increase for all universities, and the House subcommittee recommends a similar (4.2%) across-the-board base figure. What distinguishes the House proposal currently is an attempt to reward with a modest supplement those institutions that have held tuition down in recent years, with Wayne State being the foremost beneficiary of that innovation and Oakland following right behind. Our increase would thereby rise to 4.5%. Universities would be required to adopt, by the first of August, tuition increases for the coming academic year that do not exceed the local cost of living increase, however, or face the loss of the 4.2%. The provost thought the Senate would be unlikely to follow the House model, so a period of haggling remains. No quick resolution seems likely. Although neither the governor's recommendation nor that of the House subcommittee looks wonderful relative to Oakland's needs, Mr. Kleckner reminded his colleagues that educational institutions are doing better this year than other state agencies. The freeze holds on new construction starts, unfortunately, so he foresaw no progress for the science building in the near future.

With business concluded, the chair then invited a move to adjourn, and Mr. Williamson issued the call at 4:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:  
Jane D. Eberwein  
Secretary to the University Senate

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