



OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

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October 20, 1988
Second Meeting

MINUTES

Senators Present: Appleton, Beehler, Barthel, Burke, Cardimen, Chipman, Christina, Coffey, Downing, J. Eberwein, R. Eberwein, Eliezer, Grossman, Herman, Karasch, Ketchum, Kleckner, Lindell, Martek, Miller, Millwood, Muir, Olson, Pettengill, Pine, Schimmelman, Sherman, Stern, Tracy, Wilson, Witt. Senators Absent: Abiko, Bhatt, Braun, Brown, Cass, Champagne, Dahlgren, Fish, Frankie, Garcia, Gerulaitis, Hartman, Haskell, Hildebrand, Horwitz, Hough, Jackson, Larabell, Lauer, Maschke, Pillow, Reddy, Riley, Rosen, Sevilla, L. Stamps, R. Stamps, Theisen, Tripp, Wedekind, Williamson.

Summary of Actions:

This was an open forum rather than a formal business meeting. No motions were put on the floor.

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order at 3:14 p.m., explaining that this was one of those special Senate meetings occasionally called by the Steering Committee to deal with issues both broader and more far reaching than routine business. If this institution is to fulfill its mission, he declared, it must maintain an open and comfortable climate for the exchange of ideas. Finding ways to improve the campus climate for minority persons was the purpose of the faculty-generated conference at the St. Clair Inn on which he promised a report at this meeting. He mentioned that the St. Clair retreat had not yet produced an action agenda for formal governance approval, though such a result would eventually follow.

Anticipating that discussion would properly be focused at this session on areas in which the university needs to make improvement, the provost hoped that people wouldn't leave thinking that nothing is going right. The NCA accreditation report now being completed by Mr. Appleton shows much that is prospering at Oakland University even though much remains to be done; that report gives considerable attention to issues of race relations on campus. He called attention to some important successes in that area, notably the university's contributions to the state's Martin Luther King/Cesar Chavez/Rosa Parks program, and saluted persons on campus who have committed productive effort to improving academic skills among our students.

He also called attention to an impressive recent record of success in hiring women faculty. While promising presentations at this session from a number of persons interested in improving race relations, he urged his colleagues not to forget the achievements of many others

across the campus who have been working hard for this goal over an extended period. He then introduced the presenters of the report on the St. Clair conference, first among them Professor Patrick Strauss of the Department of History.

Mr. Strauss preceded his remarks with an invitation to pick up informational booklets provided by the ad hoc Faculty Committee on Racial Problems to identify participants in the St. Clair retreat, display their schedule of activities, and identify the five focus issues they had highlighted for continuing attention. He then provided a brief background sketch on the origins of the conference, tracing his interest to a history of involvement with racial issues on campus but mentioning specifically the culture shock he experienced two years ago upon his return from a year in China to find that the race problem on campus seemed to have grown mountainous rather than diminished. He felt particular concern about a climate of apathy that he sensed. He then explained how he organized the core group that organized the St. Clair event, enlisting the services of various professorial and administrative colleagues: Brian Murphy (English and Honors College); Manuel Pierson (University-School Relations); Curt Chipman (Mathematics); Gottfried Brieger (Chemistry); George Coon (SHES); DeWitt Dykes (History); and Patricia Montenegro (Modern Languages). Their purpose was to gather a small group of interested faculty members, students, and alumni for a few days of honest conversation intended to energize each other and eventually the entire university community. They invited certain members of the administration to join them for some sessions but chose not to include them in the core group of retreatants who stayed at the Inn. He then called upon Professor Brieger to summarize events of the retreat.

Mr. Brieger began with a personal observation that race relations at the university seems to elicit a "What, me worry?" response from many people. Thus, the retreat was organized to raise the level of awareness on campus. It was not intended as a criticism of programs already in place and functioning. Each day of the conference had its characteristic purpose: the first day being reserved for the listing of issues and the second for developing an inventory of possible solutions. The issues discussed were too complex to be resolved into specific proposals in two days, so the work of the retreat now continues back on campus.

The first key issue Mr. Brieger discussed was minority hiring for faculty and staff positions. He mentioned the shock felt by retreatants to discover that, of 46 new tenure-track faculty members hired by the university over the past two years, none belonged to minority groups. Several suggestions had emerged: that the university set a target for minority hiring, that it imitate programs already implemented by the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University, and that it give more attention to the role faculty members can play in minority hiring by targeting new positions to take advantage of the talent pool that may exist in specific fields. He indicated that administrative support would be enlisted for minority staffing--not just for faculty positions but for those handled through the ERD office as well.

Another key issue involved discovering community needs: defining, in particular, the needs perceived by minority students. Discussion at the St. Clair meeting revealed that these students often experience discomfort at Oakland University. Some groups on campus are felt to be insensitive to minority student needs. Sometimes university policies are found to be in conflict, as when internal admissions policies frustrate retention of students the university has actively endeavored to recruit. Minority faculty members bear a disproportionate share of the burden of supporting and assisting minority students, a responsibility that ought to be more widely distributed. Considerable attention was given to what students themselves could do to improve

the campus climate, with Mr. Brieger drawing particular attention to the theatrical performance by Dolores Burdick and Augustine Wright Pounds that demonstrated the power of drama to bring issues into the open. Stressing that his report simply highlighted issues to consider and promising an eventual written report, he then turned over the meeting to Mr. Chipman to suggest ways of keeping this initiative going.

Mr. Chipman professed himself greatly encouraged by the positive response his committee had received from everyone with whom they have dealt. He mentioned that about a hundred faculty members had expressed interest in the St. Clair meeting in addition to the 45 or so who actually attended. He was pleased that the Senate had voluntarily extended this public forum for continuing discussion. He mentioned that several ideas proposed at St. Clair had already been implemented. At this point, he felt that the main concern of the people who launched this effort must be with continuity, the attempt to assign steady high priority to issues raised at the retreat.

The timetable he proposed allowed for steady progress, much of it involving the Senate. By November 17, he hoped his group would be able to make a proposal to the Steering Committee for establishing a new standing committee on race relations. Senators could expect to find a first reading of this proposal on their December agenda, with a final vote likely at the January meeting. He hoped that the new committee would be staffed and at work by mid-February. In the meantime, he pledged that the ad hoc committee would sponsor campus meetings with various groups to deal with particular issues in detail and to carry the good cause to various constituencies. What he asked from his colleagues on this occasion was constructive thinking about the proposed Senate committee on race relations--its purposes, what it could do, how it could link up with existing committees, and how it could advise the provost and president. He particularly encouraged exchange of ideas about ways for faculty members to contribute more to improvement of the racial climate on campus, thereby pulling their own weight more adequately. That said, he deferred to other retreat participants who might have something to say, specifically to Mr. Murphy.

Adopting what he termed "a ciceronian stance" for his maiden speech before the Senate, Mr. Murphy identified himself as the committee member most involved with consideration of student experiences. He offered some thoughts about the experiences of minority students at Oakland, admitting that he had been shocked by some of the problems students reported. He was likewise dismayed at the university's dismal record of minority faculty hiring. This statement elicited a query from Mr. Burke, who wondered whether minority is defined for these purposes as encompassing Asians and Africans. Mr. Murphy applied the term to members of minority groups within the United States (blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians). He went on to mention some of the problems reported by minority students that cause them to feel isolated, ignored, and even discriminated against. These experiences occurred in a wide range of settings: in the residence halls, in campus encounters with Public Safety, even on the pages of the Oakland Post. He called for cultural sensitivity in planning campus events and encouraged general sensitivity training within the university community. In considering ways to involve students more actively in resolving these problems, he mentioned hopes of organizing a student forum on race relations that would involve students from other universities as well as Oakland. Ideas had been offered for involving our students in minority recruiting efforts and for forming a coalition of minority student organizations for outreach efforts. Like Mr. Brieger, he had been impressed by the Burdick Wright dramatic performance and thought that it had given current students incentive to experiment with theater as a means of allowing emotional and intellectual exploration.

Following Mr. Murphy's remarks, Mr. Strauss invoked executive privilege to invite Mr. Dykes to report on the opening night panel of University of Michigan students. Mr. Dykes explained that a videotape called Racism 101 had been played on the opening afternoon of the conference. This program dealt with recent racial incidents on campuses around the country, including our neighbor in Ann Arbor. Organizers of the St. Clair conference therefore invited three UM students to speak at the retreat, including one who had studied previously at Oakland and another who had appeared on the video. By presenting their own experiences, these students heightened awareness of issues and provided an excellent backdrop on campus racial problems as perceived by those most affected by them. He then summed up where we are at the moment, noting that many ideas have been gathered and that it is now time to move institutionally from an ad hoc approach to racial issues to a permanent governance structure. Mr. Kleckner then thanked these professors for their contributions to the St. Clair meeting and for bringing constructive suggestions back to the campus (some of them already implemented). To keep the dialogue going, he threw out an open invitation for the assembled multitude to respond.

Students initiated the discussion, with Ms. Beehler introducing herself as the new student representative to the Senate. She thought the timeline projected by Mr. Chipman too slow-moving for students and hoped that they would be assigned their charge in time to make full use of the St. Clair experience and consequent heightening of awareness about race relations within this academic year. Mr. Chipman encouraged her, urging any organized group on campus to reaffirm its commitment to human rights and figure out in practical terms what it could do. He volunteered that members of the ad hoc committee would be happy to participate in University Congress and Area Hall Council meetings. Ms. Beehler's status as a member of the Senate prompted Mr. Smith, head of the Association of Black Students (ABS) to inquire how and by whom she had been chosen. He wondered whether any minorities were represented among student Senators. Ms. Martek acknowledged that the current delegation comprises three white women but assured him that they were all appointed through a public process publicized in the Oakland Post. She reported that Congress is now considering establishing a permanent seat for an ABS representative. She also declared herself eager to open up a Congress meeting for an open forum comparable to this one in the Senate. Mr. Smith responded that minority students feel excluded from the campus political process; most don't read the Post or realize that the Senate even exists, never mind knowing the names of their student representatives. He urged that leadership opportunities be announced directly to the ABS, a suggestion that Mr. Kleckner affirmed as a worthy one. Mr. Smith also announced with evident pride that a black freshman woman has just won a competitive position on the *Post*.

Mr. Chipman's proposal for establishing a permanent Senate committee on race relations elicited the greatest amount of discussion. Mr. Olson declared himself in favor of establishing such a body that would be specifically charged with responding to problems and initiating corrective action. Mr. Bertocci agreed, supposing that a Senate committee might provide the necessary institutional mechanism to carry out the ideas of the conference. It seemed an especially reasonable vehicle to Mr. Chipman because Senate committees typically provide wide university representation. Nobody challenged the merit of establishing such a body, although Mr. Eberwein warned that there are limits to the effectiveness of a committee. He suggested that this one recommend the hiring of a specific officer on whose desk the buck would stop, a sort of ombudsperson to give administrative programmatic focus to this work. Ms. Osa Jackson proposed that consideration be given to having the university's equal opportunity officer report directly to the president--a step that would cost no money but would give teeth to that office. Mr. Kleckner recognized that a committee could not by itself handle all

the problems it confronted but thought it would play a productive role in alerting those who could do something as to what they might contribute in carrying out our collective responsibility. An objection to this line of thinking came from Mr. Herman, the Dean of Students, who himself already functions as a sort of ombudsperson. Noting that every campus he has worked on has had an ombudsperson, he said he would much prefer to see an army of persons who accepted such responsibility. Centralization, he declared, simply doesn't work. Mr. Wilson concurred, shifting attention back to the idea of a committee. It was his observation over a period of time that there has not yet been a full faculty commitment to get involved in the improvement of race relations. He hoped that the proposed committee would ensure steady attention from the teaching faculty, something he preferred to switching responsibility back to some administrator.

Dispute arose over the focus of the proposed committee. Mr. Pipan introduced this subject by expressing concern about many streams of prejudice and discrimination on campus, calling attention to evidence of ageism, anti-Semitism, and general cultural insensitivity. Although he recognized racism as a grave problem, he thought it symptomatic of a wider distortion of values and therefore urged that the committee's charge be an encompassing one rather than focus specifically on race. Mr. Burke agreed that the committee should deal with all issues of harassment and discrimination, giving a forum to all injured groups. This position prompted Ms. Frances Jackson to inquire whether the committee was expected to deal with human rights in broad terms or specifically with racism as a facet of human rights. She noted that sexism is another volatile human rights issue and thought the Senate needed to advise the Steering Committee on what functions the community wants this new committee to carry out. Should the School of Nursing be pressured to hire more men and the School of Business Administration more women? Are we going to have a sort of summer support program for minority faculty? How do our hiring practices eliminate qualified minority applicants in the talent pool? She urged the administration to take an aggressive stance on minority hiring and called upon it to set aside a pot of money to back that commitment. She urged assembled members of the campus community to tell the provost and president what is expected of them, then turned to the provost with words of encouragement: "We know you're going to do it, Keith." To this he replied, "You're wrong. We're going to do it." Ms. Owens, describing herself as a basically optimistic person, declared herself pleased with her experiences at the St. Clair meeting. Yet she reported that she often found prejudice on campus, sometimes so deeply ingrained as to be unconscious. Noting some of the insensitive remarks to which she had been subjected as a black faculty member, she found it difficult to distinguish the boundaries between prejudice and general insensitivity.

Ms. Beehler expressed concern that the proposed committee might lose its focus unless pointed specifically toward racism. She advised starting with race relations rather than urging students to fight all kinds of prejudice at once. Mr. Strauss thought the committee would have ample work to justify monthly meetings if it focused on the institutional aspects of racial problems; he admitted that he had a great deal to learn about such matters as retention and orientation. Mr. Dykes agreed with Ms. Beehler's concerns about focus. He worried that people were mixing up two different things: a committee to handle matters of race relations and perhaps other aspects of discrimination as well and an ombudsperson or equal opportunity officer to take action on specific incidents. Primary concern should be directed to affirmative action (going beyond mere equal opportunity) on behalf of those groups that have historically been discriminated against in the United States: blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans.

When Mr. Murphy emphasized that the Senate's first major decision on this matter would be to

determine the scope of the projected committee, he urged full airing of ideas to prepare for this significant choice. Several persons suggested a compromise between a committee exclusively focused on race relations and one that would encompass all aspects of human rights. Mr. Herman noted that a comparable University of Maryland committee on human relations has subgroups concentrating on specific areas. Although agreeing that the Steering Committee could establish a broad-based committee with selective priorities, Mr. Christina argued that setting up one committee would be inadequate to accomplish all that needed to be done. Nonetheless, Mr. Burdick affirmed that such a committee must come into existence, even if unable to solve the whole problem. The time, he maintained, had come. He declared himself in sympathy with those favoring a broad-based committee so that no person who faces discrimination will be without a place to turn. He contended that "we cannot discriminate against any possibly discriminated against group."

A number of suggestions arose about positive steps that could be taken to promote an improved campus climate with respect to race relations. Ms. Owens encouraged efforts to incorporate black history and the black experience into the curriculum. Ms. Gilroy called attention to the university's role in preparing the teachers who will be educating our children in the foreseeable future; she thought that they should be trained to correct the prejudices children now pick up in schools. She also advocated sensitivity training for students, faculty members, and clerical staff. Ms. Jackson noted that self-esteem is the basic concern: the question of education involves receptivity, reaching people as they become ready to participate. This prompted Mr. Burdick to mention that he planned to show Racism 101 in his classroom and to invite colleagues to follow his example. Recalling student presentations at St. Clair as especially memorable, Ms. Blankenship hoped that they could be included in future presentations to the Senate or, as Mr. Murphy suggested, to a student forum. Ms. Osa Jackson called attention to mentorship programs to be tried in Physical Therapy in an attempt to stimulate minority practicing clinicians to consider teaching careers at the university level. She noted that such programs could be introduced with a relatively modest sum of money. Contending that "you have to want to do it, not just talk about it," Mr. Smith doubted that mentorship programs would work if a black intern were placed under a white mentor not fully committed to the program's goal. He warned the Senate that it is up to the faculty and staff to change the perception among black students that people don't really want them to succeed. He also wondered why this group and setting were chosen for a forum on race relations, when so many incidents of discrimination occur in the residence halls or in encounters with Public Safety. If people really want to get ideas across to students, he suggested holding hearings in the residence halls and Oakland Center.

Mr. Kleckner responded that, although the University Senate is essentially a faculty body, it feels a responsibility to concern itself with the overall campus climate in which learning takes place. The particular mechanism chosen for this open forum was chosen in order to work concerns into the institutional structure. He counted on the ad hoc committee to involve student groups on other occasions. Mr. Smith recommended that students be provided specific information on how to work within the university's structures; how to complain, and to whom, about particular negative experiences. Admitting that he had questions and concerns, especially about advising problems, for all categories of students, Mr. Stern wondered what curricular sources might be available for correcting problems. Might a mandatory freshman course prove effective? He thought the projected committee could respond to such questions. Mr. Chipman then concluded discussion by repeating his group's desire for constructive ideas about the committee that had been proposed. They need good, workable suggestions for doing a better job.

On that note, Mr. Kleckner thanked the faculty members who had taken the initiative in planning the St. Clair conference and reporting to the university community. He also thanked those who had shown interest by attending this open forum of the Senate. That accomplished, he adjourned the session at 4:53 p.m.

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

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