Student Relations Advisory Committee

Minutes of March 23, 2001 Meeting


Guest: Keith Elkin, Director, Office of Student Conflict Resolution

Staff: Paul B. Welsh, Faculty Senate Office

I. Meeting called to order at 12:10 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes: Draft minutes of February 16, 2001 meeting were unanimously approved as submitted.

III. Recent NASPA annual meeting: An Ad hoc Update

The Chair invited Royster Harper and Keith Elkin to briefly highlight for SRAC relevant information coming out of the annual meeting of The National Association for Student Personnel Administrators which they attended recently. Dr. Elkin attended a presentation by the ASJA (Association for Student Judicial Affairs) where there was a discussion about common major issues happening on college campuses across the country. He noted that Michigan is somewhat unique (if not a trend-setter) among Big Ten schools for its articulation, design and implementation of a student "Statement" [aka "Code"]. A number of other campuses are beginning to design or are in the midst of revising "Statement-like" initiatives. Among a number of campuses (including those of the Big 10), there appears to be a common concern on how to appropriately and deal fairly with (in actuality) a disproportionately small number of college students (and even a few student-athletes) whose behavioral issues often can be very enticing for extensive publicity in the media.

While the NSPA meeting was viewed as being generally quite informative and very productive, Royster Harper then highlighted three major topic areas which she found important at the meeting which exemplify what Michigan is currently doing, or is on the brink of implementing--- all aimed at enhancing the full range of "student experiences" at institutions of higher learning. One topic dealt with how to emphasize and support the keystone paradigm that student learning is the guiding paradigm of what education is and should be all about. She saw that paradigm of upmost importance, and her office will
continue with existing and newer initiatives to realize significant synergies between the academic missions and student services at Michigan. As examples, Royster has recently created a division of student affairs council that will meet regularly to address the identification, development and implementation of such synergies. A second topic she brought home from the national meeting deals with how to make Student Affairs and Academic Affairs a more holistic and “seamless” experience for the benefits of the student and faculty community. A third topic area, as Royster Harper reported, dealt with the changing “face” of the modern university student, in a number of their life experiences. Among other things, the concern for healthy mental status of all students engendered some discussion at NSPA. Locally, there is a view held by some that Michigan does not have a focused policy and deliverable set of practices to nurture the “health” of mental health for its student community. Royster observed that this need is being met by a student group called "Mentality" which has done a lot of work on this matter and wants to tighten up the referral system for students who are experiencing mental health concerns. Several SRAC members suggested that this important topic (especially so for the faculty) of the changing “face” of the modern university student be an agenda item for our April meeting.

IV. OVPSA Update - E. Royster Harper

The Vice-President reported that much activity has been going on around campus related to the revisions of the document that was formerly "The Code…" and soon to be “The Statement…”, effective on or about July 1, 2001. A number of students seem to be very concerned still about the very existence of such a code, let alone the recent presidentially-approved changes to the Code. Some students presented such views at the last Regents meeting. It appears that the law and punishment end of the document is what students seem to be most concerned with. Continuing with her update, Royster Harper announced that she sees it as a most strategic and very appropriate step to move the OSCR office to a site away from its current location near that of the Office of Vice President for Student Affairs. One reason for such a geographic move is that it would put a different light or perception (i.e., non-administration tone) on the OSCR office. SRAC expressed its support for such a move for such reasons.

On other VPSA items, it was noted that the (1) budget preparation process for the next academic year is underway, including a residence hall fee proposal which will go to the Regents in April. An increase is envisioned for a five percent increase in housing fees due to chiefly a large increase in the cost of utilities, e.g. heating. On the matter of new residence halls, Royster reported she was able to look at the new residence halls at Eastern Michigan University and the University of Florida in order to get ideas for the direction of Michigan's new residence hall project. (2) The possibility of a services merger between the Ann Arbor Transit Authority and the University of Michigan Bus System is being considered and discussed. Lastly, (3) Royster welcomed and felt it most important to candidly share thoughts with SRAC [either at a forthcoming meeting or through emails to her] on what has worked well and what might work even better for SRAC next year. Among things, she would like to gain a stronger “pulse” on is what our SRAC student representatives’ needs are. She also opined that there is a great and often
“untapped” wealth and wisdom among the students and which would be very helpful to her and faculty members on SRAC. Such student input in a timely fashion was seen to be extremely valuable as her office begins a comprehensive and strategic planning process to address the myriad of service and educational missions of the OVPSA. Royster also saw the value of input coming from faculty and staff as well in such a strategic planning process.

Chair Burdi noted that the programmatic mission OVPSA is very broad in terms of programs which enhance student lives and experiences at Michigan. Now the various schools would like to have more involvement by OVSPA in the support of their current and future academic programs. Royster reported that the Regents have agreed that this OVPSA and schools initiative can be started this summer which will use a variety of forward-looking approaches, including intensive focus groups (including faculty, students, and residence hall staff). There is a vision to work with academic programs taking place in the new residence halls and within the emerging living-learning communities as well.

V. “Code/Statement” Residual Matters

The Chair next asked SRAC to focus on residual matters dealing with the committees extensive work on the “Code”. Keith Elkin reported that copies of the new “Statement…” document have already been sent out to be included in new student orientation programs over the next several months. Richard Mayk asked when these new changes and the “Statement…” would take effect? Elkin noted that things need to be in place for the beginning of the school year. As a general rule, July 1 is the date by which amendments must be made by due to incoming first years students.

Professor Burdi expressed an interest in a followup or de-briefing discussion with MSA’s Jim Secreto. Burdi noted that SRAC needs to get a cohesive and representative MSA perspective on this document, as compared to an individual or individual’s reaction to the “Statement”. Ideally--- MSA perspective as a leadership body representative of the views of all students on campus. SRAC student MSA member Richard Mayk said that he personally has no problems with "The Statement," and has attempted to find out what voice MSA wants represented at SRAC. However, Mayk has been unsuccessful in trying to communicate with the appropriate MSA leadership. SRAC student MSA member Taryn O'Leary explained that she had an experience with a DAAP candidate where he expressed that his problem with the document centered around the legal/court system section, e.g. double jeopardy concerns.

Continuing with residual “Code/Statement” matters, Professor Burdi acknowledge that SRAC has given generously of its time and energies for more than a year on the amendment procedures, in general, and, in specific, on proposed amendments to the Code coming from MSA and the Civil Liberties Board. He also reviewed that SRAC’s work was guided by such important principles as collegiality, timeliness, civility, openness, fairness, and clarity. In his continuing recount of these matters, the chair pointed out that SRAC received and discussed a “draft” of procedural steps and timelines (“SRAC Code
Amendment Review/Recommendation Process” rev. February 7, 2001). This was and continues to be viewed as a “work in progress” that could be modified as needed and justified by SRAC in terms of how it wished to responsibly manage future proposals to amend the “Statement”. Several SRAC members concurred that this plan was indeed a “working plan” and not a rigid or unalterable formula. Significant changes would not necessarily come with the underlying principles and substance of the current plan. Instead, flexibility and re-working of the timelines (noted in the above-referenced “SRAC Code Amendment Review/Recommendation Process”) may be the areas of needed revision. In concluding his brief review of residual “Code/Statement” matters, the chair opined that the substance and kinds of steps in the amendment review/recommendation plan should be the “backbone” of the process. Given this, Professor Burdi asked SRAC if it was in position to formally accept the “SRAC Code Amendment Review/Recommendation Process” (rev. February 7, 2001). In following discussion, Professor Teshome Wagaw expressed concern about the MSA turnover as well as SRAC turnover in terms of those incoming groups having knowledge or memory of what went on in revising of the "The Code." He asked, should the committee wait until the new leadership is in place? Burdi and other SRAC members noted that group memberships will naturally change from year-to-year. But, not always entirely so there is a built-in continuity mechanism. Professor Faerber felt that if MSA was so concerned about this, then the MSAPresident or other officers would have accepted the chair’s invitation to attend this meeting. Grad Student member Colin Heitzmann agreeing with Faerber said that the SRAC’s work should move forward on this task, saying a framework should be created and that MSA should be invited to work with SRAC. Much of the committee agreed that the process should move forward, taking into account the presence of input and wisdom of MSA reps already present on SRAC.

Motion: Professor Donald Heller moved that SRAC accept the “SRAC Code Amendment Review/Recommendation Process” (rev. February 7, 2001) document as written. The motion was seconded by Professor Faerber, and then unanimously accepted by all members of SRAC in attendance.

VI. Matters Arising from the Committee

Next meeting called (as scheduled) for April 20, 2001. No additional matters were brought up by SRAC members.

VII. Meeting was then adjourned by Chair Burdi at 1:33 p.m. and thanked all for coming.

Minutes taken and drafted by Paul Welsh, and respectfully submitted to SRAC by Paul Welsh and Professor Burdi