

Report of the Mission and Social Justice Committee to the University Senate

2009-2010

Committee Members: Antonia Allsman, Nancy Ata, Ryan Conway, Mark Graham, Nicole Harmuth, Beth Hassel Sarah Hicks, Margaret Holtgrieve, Thomas Mogan, Terry Nance, Mary Papalaskari, Bernard Prusak, William Stehl, Dan Tropeano, Lindsey Waters, William Werpehowski, Fayette Veverka, chair

The Mission and Social Justice committee has met four times since September 2009 and can report work on the following issues:

1. Senate Rules and Review Evaluation of Mission and Social Justice Committee Report

The chair of the committee responded to the Report recommendations by

- a. Soliciting schedules of committee members in order to schedule meeting dates and times. Finding time when the majority of members can be present has still proved difficult.
- b. Orienting new members by reviewing the previous year's work at its first meeting of the new school year.
- c. Creation of a continuity binder from outgoing chair to incoming chair is planned for the next change in committee leadership.

Sparked by this external review of our work, the committee continues to work on ways to identify issues for its work. Thus far, it seems that issues of concern in the community somehow get directed to this committee, so it is not that we lack agenda items. But the committee also wants to ensure that those who have an issue know where and how to address their concerns. One suggestion was to query faculty and students regarding issues they might want MSJ to address, perhaps through a new site on My Nova "VU groups."

2. Parental leave policy

As we reported to the Senate last April, the committee submitted recommendations on parental leave policies for faculty and staff to the office of Human Resources to be considered as part of their benefits review process. We are hoping to discuss the results of the review with Human Resources this semester to determine the need for further action on this issue.

3. Professor Jeanne Brody approached the committee with a concern about the availability of health insurance coverage for adjunct faculty, specifically, allowing adjuncts to cover the full cost of their own insurance through Villanova's plan. The proposal she presented was similar to an initiative at Marquette University to provide more adequately for part time employees. Dr. Brody's concerns were communicated to Human Resources for further review. The committee intends to continue this conversation with Dr. LaCorte on completion of the benefits review process.

4. Parking

After the Senate vote in the spring rejecting a two year experiment eliminating parking fees for faculty and staff proposed by the ad hoc Senate committee chaired by Rick Epstein, the committee is considering an alternative approach of a tiered parking fee structure with incentives to encourage wider use of public transportation and car pooling on campus.

The decision to work on this issue was met with strong objections from some in the Villanova community who questioned the appropriateness of parking fees at Villanova as a social justice issue. This generated a significant conversation within the committee itself. In the past our committee has dealt with global issues like socially responsible investing and the genocide in Darfur, but we have also address local issues of institutional justice like parental leave, child care, health insurance benefits, and access for the disabled. In our view, parking fees raise two kinds of social justice questions that are difficult because they tend to work against one another. One issue is fairness. Parking fees impose an unequal burden on the lowest paid employees of the University. Many believe that workers earning \$30,000 or less per year bear the same costs to come to work as those making \$150,000 or above, especially during a recession with workers getting by with no salary increases. What seems like a modest fee for those who are well paid may feel quite different to folks who must make hard choices just to make ends meet. There is also an issue of the impact of automobile usage on the environment. Parking policies can have consequences for the decisions people make about how to get to work. A carefully designed set of incentives might lessen the costs for those who depend on public transportation and perhaps encourage more workers to choose this option voluntarily. The Catholic commitment to a “preferential option for the poor” asks us to examine the consequences of institutional policies on those who are most vulnerable in our community. It is in this spirit that the committee is pursuing this issue. We have appreciated the cooperation of Ken Valosky assisting us on the financial end of things, the work of Rick Epstein on a model of a “sliding scale” approach to parking fees, and have now charged a task force of students and faculty to bring the best of these ideas together in a proposal to be presented at our next committee meeting.

5. Proposal to establish a goal of 100% funding of student financial aid need within ten years

The committee met with both George Walker and Steve Merrit to inform ourselves of Villanova’s financial aid and admission’s goals and how these would be affected by establishing a goal of 100% financing of student financial aid need. As a result of the discussion, the committee felt confident that the goal of 100% financing of student aid was a serious goal of the administration, though no explicit time line for reaching that goal had been established. Committee members appreciated the complexity of financial tensions affecting the achievement of 100% financing and there was some discussion of the need for a proposal from MSJ to the Senate in support of this goal. This led to a broader discussion of the various kinds of support including, but not limited to financial aid needed to adequately support an increasingly economically diverse student body on campus. The committee called for a campus wide discussion about the changing character of the student body and the kinds of institutional responses required by this shift.

6. Other items. The committee followed up on two initiatives from spring 2009. It heard a report on the work of Just Foods which is reviewing a program at Ursinas College that allows students to donate the costs of unused meals in their meal plans to support area food banks. Concern about the decision to discontinue use of fair trade coffee in Dougherty and ongoing attention to the progress of the designated suppliers program were directed to appropriate University groups concerned with or responsible for these issues.