

REPORT OF
THE MISSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
TO
THE UNIVERSITY SENATE
FEBRUARY 2, 2007
Jonathan Doh, Chair

The Mission and Social Justice Committee (“MSJC” or “Committee”) is one of the Standing Committees of the Villanova University Senate. The charge of the Committee is to recommend changes in policy in areas of social concern and sensitivity and alert Villanova to opportunities and problems in areas of social action and community relations. As such, in the words of one of its previous chairs, the Committee acts as the “conscience of the university.”

Operationally, the Committee investigates matters that are referred to it by the Senate and its Executive Committee as well as initiates consideration of issues that fall within its broad jurisdiction. These topics concern both matters that are confined to the Villanova campus as well as those that span local, national, and international domains. The Committee often works in conjunction with other entities with which it has shared interests. These include, inter alia, Campus Ministry, Office of Mission Effectiveness, the Center for Peace and Justice Education, and the VQI Environment Team.

Among the recent accomplishments of the committee are working with the University’s Human Resource office in developing a comprehensive parental/adoption leave policy and with various constituencies in formulating a resolution on social responsibility and the university endowment (see below). The Committee also lent its support to an ad-hoc committee working to provide subsidies for employees’ use of public transportation, perhaps in the form of Flexible Spending accounts. The Committee has also investigated some issues, but subsequently decided not to pursue them. This was the case when the committee looked in to the fair wage issue during AY 2004-2005. During AY 2006-2007, the Committee has and will continue to concentrate on several ongoing and emerging issues. These are discussed in some additional detail below.

Socially Responsible Investing and the University Endowment

Beginning in the fall of FY 2005-2006, the Committee began exploring the opportunity to have the University Endowment adopt a more affirmative stance with regard to socially responsible investing (SRI). This process began with research into the positions and policies of other peer institutions with regard to SRI policies of their respective endowments. It progressed to include discussions with the University’s Vice President for Finance, the Director of the Office of Mission Effectiveness, members of the Senate Executive Committee, and others. After a presentation to the Senate, the tabling of the proposal, and further input from a wide range of interested stakeholders, the final resolution was presented to the Senate and approved unanimously on October 20, 2006.

One provision of the resolution requires that MSJC report annually on its assessment of socially responsible investing by Villanova University. The Committee is currently in the process of establishing a subcommittee to take responsibility for this charge. In addition, the Chair of the MSJC was recently elected to the University Investment Committee, the entity responsible for implementing and reporting on the resolution, providing another opportunity for collaborative work in implementation of this resolution.

Child Care

The committee has, for some time, been interested in University policies that affect families and children. As mentioned above, the Committee was instrumental in successfully urging the university to adopt a policy that would extend leave benefits to parents adopting children or caring for parents or other family members. Building on several years of work and previous discussions with the Senate, President, and Board of Trustees, the Committee is currently exploring approaches for improving the child care options available to Villanova University faculty and staff.

Over the past 30+ years, several committees, including the Mission and Social Justice Committee, have urged the University Administration to move forward with some type of child care policy. These initiatives did not result in any substantial progress, largely due to budgetary and legal concerns. While several resolutions urging for the establishment of child care centers and/or subsidies for employees' child care costs have unanimously passed the University Senate, in the past, the President and Board of Trustees have chosen not to move forward. The MSJC has decided that, rather than draft another proposal, we will draft a letter to be sent directly to the President, urging him to act immediately on a comprehensive child care policy that will help Villanova employees with their child care options and expenses. We believe that by passing a child care policy for employees, the President and the University Administration would show its support for family issues, which are central to the university mission.

Commentary on Broader Social Issues

One area with which the committee has grappled is the responsibility of the committee – and the University – to comment on and seek redress for broader social matters in ways consistent with the University mission. Apparently, this has long been a topic of discussion by the Committee and its predecessor committees, dating back to at least the 1960s. The current issue that confronts the Committee and the University is the tragic conflict and genocide taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan. The Committee is currently working on a policy that would guide whether and how it would provide comment on – and direction to – the University regarding these types of issues, in order to avoid fruitless debate and contentiousness on politicized issues.

Initial discussion has highlighted the Committee's belief that it should take responsibility to raise the University community's awareness regarding catastrophes of global significance. Some policy provisions under discussion include proposing resolutions for consideration by the University Senate, and ways to enlarge student comprehension of issues to encourage active, compassionate involvement. Additionally, the official recognition of such issues by the University community can serve as guidelines for the University in evaluating policies such as investments (for example, in the case of apartheid in South Africa).

Relations with the Senate and the University

The Committee has had a good working relationship with the overall Senate and the rest of the University. Among possible initiatives to improve this relationship further are: (1) orientation and training for committee chairs, (2) annual meetings of the committee chairs and Executive Committee, and (3) other mechanisms to improve communications and information flow.