

REPORT OF
THE MISSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
TO
THE UNIVERSITY SENATE
MARCH 14, 2008
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 and initiates consideration of issues that fall within its broad jurisdiction. These topics concern both matters that are confined to the Villanova campus and community 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 Sustainability Group President’s Climate Commitment. I would also like to mention that this committee has developed an especially close working relationship with the University Academic, Administrative and Student leadership.

Among the recent accomplishments of the committee is our role – in conjunction with many other groups across campus – in advocating for a comprehensive child care initiative. We also worked closely with University Administration in the implementation of the socially responsible investment procedures. Finally, we addressed broader – even global – issues of social justice through our development and drafting of a resolution regarding the situation in Darfur/Sudan which was approved by the Senate last fall and is now being implemented by the University.

Socially Responsible Investing and the University Endowment

In the fall of 2005, 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 and Administration, 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 first report which we recently completed is appended to this document. In sum, we believe the University Administration has fully and faithfully implemented the letter and spirit of the resolution. Indeed, the creation of a special committee to participate in proxy ballot voting on behalf of the university was not something called for in the resolution but was initiated by University Administration in a good faith effort to use all possible avenues to implement the resolution.

In addition, as Chair of the MSJC, I was elected last year 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. Moreover, I was also appointed as the President's representative on the Committee to vote Social Responsibility Proxies, so there is close communication and coordination between and among these various aspects of implementation of the SRI resolution.

Commentary on Broader Social Issues

As I indicated when I spoke to you last year, one area with which the committee has struggled is in our responsibility— and the University overall – to comment on and participate in broader social matters. This has long been a longstanding topic of discussion by the Committee and its predecessor committees, dating back to at least the 1960s. The issue that confronted the Committee and the University this past year was the tragic conflict and genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Initially, the Committee considered developing a policy that would guide us regarding whether and how to comment on these types of issues, and to provide some direction in how we would communicate those perspectives to the University. Our concerns was to identify some standard or threshold such that we could avoid fruitless debate and contentiousness on politicized issues and also to have some mechanism to decide not to act in cases where we felt the issue did not merit our consideration. Ultimately, however, we found it difficult to craft a generalized policy. Instead, we concluded that good, reasoned judgment would be the guidepost. In the case of a proposed University Senate resolution regarding Darfur, it seemed clear and unambiguous that this was the sort of the issue that called for university action.

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 35+ 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. Last year, we documented the long history of discussions in a lengthy report and timeline which we forwarded to the President. At that time, the President had already asked University Finance and Administration to explore options.

We – like many across the campus – were delighted with the proposal that University Finance and Administration proposed and that the President issues formally late last year. I want to make a special note that the Administration consulted closely with us in the development of that policy and we had the opportunity to provide some initial feedback before it was finalized. While we might quibble about the dollar amounts, this initiative is nothing short of a major breakthrough in terms of sending a strong signal that Villanova supports working families and is willing to step up in terms of providing a practical, tangible benefit.

University Benefits

The Committee has long been interested in ensuring that the University's benefits policy is comprehensive, fair, and consistent with the University's mission. To this end, we are currently working on a document to provide some suggestions to the University Administration as it embarks on what we understand to be a comprehensive benefits review.

Relations with the Senate and the University

As was the case last year, you asked that I comment on the Committee's working relationship with the overall Senate and the rest of the University and any ways to improve that relationship. In general, the Committee has excellent relations with the Senate overall and the University. As noted previously above, we have developed an especially cooperative relationship with the Senate, and University of Academic, Administrative, and Student Leadership. Last year, I suggested the following as possible ways to improve communication and coordination: (1) orientation and training for committee chairs, and (2) annual meetings of the committee chairs and Executive Committee. To our knowledge, these initiatives have not been taken up and we urge the Senate to consider them going forward.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this report.

Submitted on this day, 14 March, 2008

By Jonathan P. Doh

Chair, Senate committee on Mission and Social Justice