

Minutes of the Meeting

Commission on University Support

Tuesday, April 5, 3:00 to 5:00, Room 400D, Burruss

The meeting was called to order by Carl Polan in the absence of the chair, Jim Armstrong.

Present were Patrick Donohoe, Pat Edwards, Marvin Foushee for Jim Wolfe, Evelyn Graybeal, Paul Metz, Carl Polan, B. Russell, David L. Russell, Bill Sanders for Erv Blythe, Ray Smoot, Wyatt Sasser, and Neal Vines. Visitors included J. Martin Hughes and Richard F. Hirsh.

The minutes of the Commission Meeting of March 1, 1994 were approved after the correction of several typos.

The Minutes of the Computing Committee meeting of February 2, 1994 were approved as read.

Old Business:

Review of the composition of committees reporting to the Commission.

Carl Polan began by reviewing the present membership rules of the four committees that report to the commission and specifically identified the requirement that all standing committees "should include undergraduate students, graduate students, classified staff, and faculty representatives as well as administrators. Faculty, classified staff, and student members will be elected by appropriate representative bodies. Each standing committee will have on it a commission member appointed to that committee by the commission it reports to."

Membership lists of the reporting committees were provided to the commission members for review. It was mentioned that the pending elimination of the position of Associate VP for Facilities as part of phase II would have implications for the present membership mix of the Building Committee.. Polan pointed out that such adjustments to committee membership likely will be needed periodically. Ray Smoot suggested that perhaps the Director of Physical Plant might be a good substitute on the Building Committee. In addition, he mentioned that neither the Provost nor the Executive Vice President have participated on the Building Committee for several years. They may wish to be asked about whether they should continue to be listed. The requirement that two "deans of an undergraduate college" serve on the Building Committee is problematic also and should be revisited.

It was recommended that Larry Moore be asked to take a look at the present membership and express an opinion about whether or not the commission is currently in compliance with the rules. Carl Polan indicated that he would follow up on that recommendation.

New Business

Presentation of a proposal to establish an Energy and Environment Advisory Committee

Drs. Hirsh and Hughes led a discussion of the possible need on campus for a committee to deal with energy and environmental matters. Citing the recent events surrounding the University's new coal boiler Hirsh suggested that the proper use of such a committee comprised of selected, qualified, and interested faculty might have helped avoid some of the problems and criticisms that occurred. He said that some problems with the early plan required that the University submit a revised plan to the EPA. He felt that many of the issues could have been handled better ahead of time had there been a more formal mechanism to integrate public review earlier in the process. Furthermore, he suggested that much emphasis is placed on building new facilities while relatively little thought is given to maintaining or properly operating older ones. As an example, he pointed to the current Virginia Tech smoke stack that exists in the middle of town, can sometimes be seen emitting black smoke, and that affects all who live in the area.

The boiler issue is but one example of the large problems that Professor Hirsh perceives to be of concern. Changes in environmental protection regulations and rapidly evolving issues all need to be tracked and addressed. We have great expertise on campus in these areas and yet few of our own experts seem to be consulted in such matters.

Question for Dr. Hirsh: Is there any agreement from university decision makers that they would consult with the proposed committee? Would this committee be supportive of, or adversarial to, our decision makers?

In response, Professor Hirsh presented letters from Bobby Criminger and Saifur Rahman saying that they would endorse the idea, and he hopes that the committee would not be adversarial.

Paul Metz asked about whether various other issues, such as noise pollution and trash, would be included in the scope of this committee? Pat Edwards echoed concerns about the scope of a committee concerning something as potentially broad as "energy and the environment", indicating the hope that it be constituted narrowly enough to be manageable.

Hirsh and Hughes responded that they view their proposal as a working document. Hughes opined that in the past we have made some mistakes that could have been avoided if a mechanism of this sort had been in place and functioning.

Ray Smoot indicated that he doesn't believe the University's approach to the boiler issue has been at all casual or clumsy as might be inferred from some of the comments. He referred to the published ads and the three public meetings that were scheduled by the Department of Environmental Quality (who determined the timing in spite of university requests for meetings at times when more people might be present). He pointed out that Professor Mashburn in Mechanical Engineering has been working on the project for quite a while and expresses ongoing strong support. The university also has used a well regarded engineering consulting firm to do the analyses, and mistakes concerning the smoke stacks were due to incorrect data that was supplied for the analysis.

Dr. Smoot went on to point out that in environment and

energy, we walk a narrow path between good stewardship and expense, something that impacts us all since there is no pot of money, outside of that which supports us all, from which to fund these activities. We take as a given that we must meet all environmental standards required by government regulation, but it is very costly. We can certainly be more aggressive if we are willing to pay the price.

He closed his comments by saying that the idea of having a committee to discuss these issues is a good one, but that it certainly must be broad based to insure that it does not push any one particular point of view.

Other comments indicated that we must take into account our location in southwest Virginia and the importance of coal to local economies. These are certainly factors that will affect what the university will do.

Dr. Hughes mentioned that the issue is not so much coal, as it is the process by which we try to move these projects ahead. The purpose of the committee would be NOT to point fingers at the past but to help avoid problems in the future. Whether we burn coal or not is not the issue, but rather how we use our best resources to help the university make good decisions, particularly in light of all the new technologies that exist of which the university may not be aware.

The question was raised as to whether the Extension and Public Service divisions wouldn't be mechanisms for doing what is proposed. Professor Hirsh countered that the concern was more with placing a formal mechanism within the University to address the issues.

Carl Polan agreed with Ray Smoot that the university has followed proper process and procedures, but that the issue may be more one of what can be accomplished through better use of our resources and how we take advantage of opportunities that might be present in a broader approach.

Wyatt Sasser asked about what authority the committee would have? Carl Polan recalled the advisory role cited in the proposal and Dr. Hughes added that a communications role also was important.

Carl Polan suggested that this proposal be given further consideration at a future meeting. Dr. Hirsh indicated that he would be interested in helping to flesh out the idea with members of the commission, and that indeed the initial document was not ready for any kind of a vote.

Polan indicated that he would speak with the chairman and decide how best to proceed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:24pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 3, 3:00 PM, in Burruss 400D.

Commission on University Support
Minutes of the Meeting
May 10, 1994
(Whittemore Hall 457, 3:00-5:00 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Armstrong. Present were Jim Armstrong, Patrick Donohoe, Marvin Foushee for Jim Wolfe, Spencer Hall, Paul Metz, Carl Polan, Buddy Russell, Bill Sanders for Erv Blythe, Wyatt Sasser, Bob Schubert for Pat Edwards, Ray Smoot, and Neal Vines.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Commission Meeting of April 5, 1994 were approved as distributed.

The Computing Committee minutes of March 2, 1994 were accepted.

The Communications Resources Committee minutes of March, 1994 were accepted.

The Building Committee minutes of April 12, 1994 were accepted.

The minutes from the November 16 and February 2 Parking Committee meetings were circulated to the commission members for review with instructions to send comments by e-mail to the chair.

OLD BUSINESS

Review of the committee composition report sent to Larry Moore:

The recommendations report was circulated and Dr. Armstrong gave a brief overview of key points. Discussion ensued.

Polan: How do we determine whether or not people like me should serve on this commission? I'm no longer on the Parking Committee but am vice-chair of the commission this year and chair next year. When they nominate someone else to the Parking Committee, will I still be on this commission? Do we just enlarge the commission at that point?

Armstrong: Yes, we can enlarge the commission by 4 members. I didn't address the issue of term. but the normal term is 3 years. maybe each year each committee just ensures that one of its members is on the commission.

Sasser: Each committee's membership is spelled out in the constitution and by-laws.

Polan: But that can mess up the continuity. Besides, if you get here and then are not officially still a member of the commission according to the by-laws, what happens?

Armstrong: The new memo we sent to Larry Moore will go into the by-laws and thereby we can insure compliance of the committees with the revised bylaws.

Smoot: The membership of the commission is set where?

Armstrong: In the bylaws, but these new recommendations will enlarge the commission by 4 members, plus each committee will increase by one member to have a representative from the administrative/professional faculty. The issue of term probably should be discussed with Larry Moore, but usually you serve a three year term. It would be possible to leave a committee assignment, but remain on the commission. This needs work and Carl and I will talk to Larry Moore and send e-mail to the commission.

A memorandum from Patrick Donohoe was circulated in which concerns were expressed about problems experienced this past year in receiving reports from some committees and the meeting infrequency of the Parking and Building Committees. Donohoe also expressed concerns about campus snow removal plans and access to buildings. Both Spencer Hall and Wyatt Sasser responded with details about present and future plans, particularly those related to priorities for handicap access and the primary entrances to buildings. The Parking and Issues Committee is looking into that problem.

Ray Smoot pointed out that the non-academic aspects of university operations cannot be addressed or handled in committees and suggested that the committees need to focus on policy level issues.

Sasser responded that the Staff Senates committee felt a need to forward some recommendations relative to the problems experienced during the recent winter snow storms.

Smoot reiterated his opinion that the problem was an administrative one and not a governance one.

With respect to the Building Committee, Donohoe suggested that periodically a "Reader's Digest" version of the committee's information be forwarded to the Commission.

Smoot said that the Building Committee does not receive the subcommittee reports that are specific to each underway project, that those reports usually go to those directly involved with or affected by the respective projects. The subcommittees do not report back to the Building Committee but rather to the University Architect and his staff who are moving the project. They have to deal with items quickly because construction is in progress and they convene on short notice to deal with short term problems and decisions. By the time such a report would come up through the governance system, the project would have moved ahead.

Armstrong pointed out that the same is true of the Computing Center and other operations which raises the question of the role of this commission. Without this commission then committee reports would just go forward to University Council. As an example of the need for raising issues, Polan mentioned the decision of the university to "go with Macintoshes" as an example of something the commission was not made aware of until largely after the fact.

Armstrong: The commission probably could do a better job of reviewing the committee reports, and make a stronger effort to represent the respective constituencies by bringing forward concerns about how those constituencies will be affected. For example, does everyone like having Apple

computers all over the campus?

Smoot: This was a major problem because up to two months ago we were still buying IBM PCs because we hadn't gotten the word. Carl Polan echoed this concern.

Sanders reminded the committee of Erv Blythe's recent presentation to the committee on the computing plans and Carl Polan added that the move to Macintoshes is not mandatory.

Armstrong reiterated his point that such issues still needed to be identified and brought forward for discussion as early as possible.

Metz: Most of the minutes come from committees on which someone here is a member?

Armstrong: Yes. but one of the problems is technical expertise. It's hard to know how you are affected unless you have expertise. A filter of some sort is needed.

Metz: Perhaps the chair should be more proactive in pointing to those issues that require attention. It takes discipline to read and attend to the minutes and we don't always do that.

Armstrong: That's our job, to read the minutes and represent our constituencies. Maybe we should have the minutes of each committee presented and interpreted by the representative from that committee so that we can more effectively identify and discuss key points.

Smoot: Another role would be to advocate for several needs that the commission itself might perceive at the first of the year, and then spend some effort on them throughout the year. For example, the issue of classroom quality. Most people think we have a beautiful campus, but if you go inside the buildings, particularly the classrooms, we're not so good. This committee and its constituent organizations could have a significant impact on that problem by bringing together resources behind the scenes and making an effort to improve something like classrooms. Each committee member might bring forward some recommendations and we could pick those that were of the broadest interest.

Russell: Visitors are often bothered by so many entrances to the university. Which ones should they use to get to different places? We could work on that.

Metz: I defy any visitor to campus to locate the place they need to go to get the visitor pass. [laughter]

Donohoe: Perhaps in the fall we could invite Peter Karp to come talk about the master plan for the university and to talk about some of these issues. He has indicated a willingness to come.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 for the Tour DuPont.

--JIM ARMSTRONG
EE DEPT
VIRGINIA TECH