

Committee on Student Affairs

Minutes of the 44th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs held on 7 January 2011 at 10:15 am at Room 5015

- Present : Prof Karl Tsim (Chairman), Prof Kar-Yan Tam,
Prof Roger Cheng, Prof Tai-Kai Ng, Prof King Chow,
Prof Chi-Ming Chan, Prof Kristiaan Helsen, Mr Sun Hung,
Miss Irene Chau, Dr Grace Au (Member and Secretary)
- On Sabbatical Leave : Prof Charles Chan
- Absent with apologies: Mr Johnny Ho, Mr Jack Ho
- In Attendance : Miss Angela Chiu (Vice-Chairman, SU Council),
Mrs Pandora Yuen (SAO), Ms Codana Chan (SAO)

Action

Welcome

1. The Chairman extended a warm welcome to the student representatives who were attending the meeting for the first time.

Student Societies Election Campaign

2. CSA at its 43rd meeting discussed chanting and other issues related to Student Societies Election Campaign. SU proposed a plan to conduct a survey on views of all students, faculty and staff on chanting. Drawing reference to comments of Members on the proposed questionnaire, SU revised the questionnaire and the on-line survey was conducted in early December 2010.
3. With the data collected, SU had prepared a Proposal on Promotion Period for members' consideration. Members noted that UAC would discuss the Chanting Issue at its meeting on 27 Jan 2011. The SU Proposal, together with CSA's views would have to be submitted to UAC for consideration.

SU Proposal

4. Mr Sun Hung presented the SU Proposal. The campaign period would be held during 8 – 28 Feb 2011, a total of 15 working days. Two chanting sessions were proposed, 12:45 – 1:50 pm and 6 – 7 pm. The chanting time during lunch was reduced by 10 minutes to end at 1:50 pm before students and staff return after lunch at 2 pm. It was also proposed that the counter areas be moved towards the Piazza to make room for chanting area. This arrangement aimed at reducing the concentration of chanting at the escalator landing from the Concourse. There was also a proposal to draw lots to allocate the chanting areas to prevent students from staying overnight to take up a chanting space.

Findings of the Survey

5. After the presentation by Mr Sun Hung, the Committee went through the findings of the survey. A total of 845 responded to the survey. 463 responses were from students while 382 from faculty/staff. Among the students, 121 had served in student societies and 342 had not. According to the results, majority of the respondents said that chanting noise was too loud (67%), and had affected their work/study (64%). 62% were worried about the possible health hazard caused by exposure to noise. 54% strongly disagreed/disagreed to allow chanting. In general, the respondents thought chanting had more negative elements.
6. Mr Sun Hung was invited to share SU's views on the survey results. Mr Hung reiterated that chanting was a tradition and culture for HKUST students and its objective was to promote the nominated cabinets to the students. However, some members pointed out that according to the survey results, only some 25% of the student responses said it was a tradition of student election. Even among those who had served in student societies, 38% strongly disagreed/disagreed to allow chanting.
7. Prof CM Chan expressed the view that students should aim at promoting the positive elements. He said if chanting brought about more negative than positive elements, then more promotion would simply amplify the negative aspect and was counter-productive to the whole process.
8. Prof Kristiaan Helsen conveyed the views of his fellow faculty members that students should use different ways such as digital means, forums, debates and so on, instead of chanting, to promote election. He said there were concerns over health risks, hooliganism, bullying, hampering university services and other negative elements of chanting. He and his colleagues strongly disagreed with chanting.
9. Miss Irene Chan added that some PG students found chanting chaotic and they had no idea about the purpose of chanting. There were views that chanting might not be a very effective way to do promotion. She shared that in other universities, debates and panel discussions were being used as alternatives.
10. Prof KY Tam suggested that students should address the views of the survey respondents. He said it was now good timing for SU to lead a change of the culture by exploring alternatives to the use of Atrium as chanting area and to chanting as a mode of promotion.
11. Prof Roger Cheng also expressed his views that chanting was a problem as revealed by the survey results. He suggested SU not to focus on chanting, but to open up discussions on the spirit of student election and alternative means of promotion, with a view to achieving a good balance.

Action

12. Prof King Chow reminded SU of its position to represent the whole student body and not being perceived as only representing certain groups of students. He said SU should also take care of the opinion of those students who disagreed with chanting. He further suggested that chanting and counter promotion should be held at locations further away from the LG1 staircase or escalator landing, so as to keep clear of the major passageways to reduce the disturbance.
13. Prof TK Ng pointed out that there was a need to answer the voice of the respondents. He said a future plan from SU on a solution for the problem would be helpful for the Committee to consider its proposal.

Monitoring and Penalties

14. On monitoring the promotion activities, Mr Sun Hung further elaborated that students would be asked to observe the rules and regulations on chanting time, chanting areas and noise level. The student societies would be closely monitored by SU. Student societies violating the rules and regulations would be given warnings and their promotion period would be terminated for a number of days upon four warnings. There was concern over the effectiveness of the penalty system as last year's practice, in that societies' promotion would be terminated upon two warnings, was found not effective.
15. There was discussion on controlling the noise level as it might cause health hazard. It was agreed to consult HSEO for a noise limit. It was suggested that once the limit was exceeded, students would be required to stop chanting for 15 minutes right away, or chanting on the next day would be called off as penalty. SAO

Actions

16. After discussion, it was agreed that: Mr Sun Hung
 - a) SU to look for alternative ways to promote election by various means such as student survey, liaison with student societies, forums, etc.
 - b) SU to propose a future plan to solve the problems of chanting.
 - c) As to the current proposal, SU to revise it to include measures to control the noise level, an effective penalty system, guidelines for student societies and further reduction of the chanting time.

(There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 nn.)