

Committee on Student Affairs

Minutes of the 49th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs held on 22 December 2011 at 3 pm at Room 7341.

Present	:	Prof Karl Tsim (Chairman), Prof Kar-Yan Tam, Prof Roger Cheng, Prof Kristiaan Helsen, Prof King Chow, Miss Irene Chau, Mr Jack Ho, Dr Grace Au (Member and Secretary)
By Invitation	:	Mr Tsang Ka-Long Tim, President, HKUSTSU Mr Wong Chun Kit Jethro, External Secretary, HKUSTSU Mr Wang Tian Tim, Council Chairperson, HKUSTSU
On Sabbatical Leave	:	Prof Charles Chan
Absent with apologies:	:	Prof Tai-Kai Ng, Prof Chi-Ming Chan, Mr Johnny Ho, Mr Sun Hung
In Attendance	:	Mrs Pandora Yuen (SAO), Mr Raymond Tang (SAO), Ms Daisy Kwan (SAO)

Action

Welcoming

1. The Chairman welcomed Mr Tsang Ka-Long Tim, Mr Jethro Wong, Mr Tim Wang who attended the meeting by invitation.

Confirmation of Minutes of Last Meeting

2. 1 Minutes of the 48th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs were confirmed.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

3. Matter arising was related to SU's proposal for the Student Societies Election Campaign in February 2012 (CSA/49/1).

Student Societies Election Campaign February 2012

4. The Chairman invited Mrs Pandora Yuen to provide a brief recapitulation of previous discussions.
5. The Chairman reminded members and SU again of the basis of support from CSA towards SU election proposal for 2011: "it was based on the understanding that SU would explore alternate means other than chanting that CSA supported the SU election proposal last year. Without any new methods for promotion, solutions to reduce the noise, and concrete measures to keep the activities under control, it would be difficult for CSA to support any proposal again."

SU's proposal

6. Mr Jethro Wong gave a power point presentation on SU's proposal for the Student Election Campaign 2012 (CSA/49/1). SU and student societies were of the view that the noise level and blockage problem related to chanting activities had greatly improved in February 2011. They therefore proposed to continue chanting activities in the Student Election Campaign 2012 between 6 and 24 February. Two chanting sessions were proposed: 12:45-1:55pm and 5:45-6:45pm and the chanting area would be similar to last year except that one of the passage ways between the Chinese Restaurant to and from the Piazza would be closed.

Action

7. SU also proposed that the noise limit be raised to 95dB. Reference was made to the Environmental Protection Department Noise Control Guidelines for Holding Open Air Entertainment Activities where ‘noise level ... should not be more than 10 dB(a) above prevailing background noise’ and to the measurement data collected last year which indicate that back ground noise level was about 86-87 dB. With people not being blocked from the passage way, it was believed that they would not be exposed to the noise level to any harmful extent.
8. Mr Jethro Wong indicated that more severe penalties would be imposed on violators to ensure effective regulation including, no chanting outside chanting area, noise level control, etc. Specifically, to tackle the issue of blockage at key passage ways, current executive committee of student societies would be restricted from key passage ways (ie the restricted zones) to watch the chanting of their new cabinet. The whole Executive Committee of the SU would be on the spot to enforce the regulations in cooperation with the SU Council.
9. The Chairman asked Mrs Pandora Yuen to present a short power point comparison of the differences between the student election campaign proposal as of February 2011, as endorsed by the Committee, and the current proposal for February 2012. He then followed up with SU on whether alternative ways or methods for promotion would be tabled for discussion as agreed in previous Committee meetings.
10. Mr Jethro Wong explained that meetings were held with student societies to consider other promotional activities that reduce the negative influence to other university members. However, there were no workable plans agreed to date. Mr Tim Tsang added that SU had proposed several alternatives to student societies but none was feasible according to student groups.

Noise Issue

11. Prof King Chow enquired about the rationale behind changing the chanting area which closed one of the passage ways between the Chinese Restaurant to and from the Piazza and the justifications for raising the noise limit to 95dB.
12. Mr Jethro Wong explained that, based on observations in February 2011, few passers-by used the passage way in discussion and the change would be an enhancement that would help passers-by get to their destinations in a more effective manner. As for raising the noise limit to 90dB, reference was made to the Environmental Protection Department Noise Control Guidelines for Holding Open Air Entertainment Activities.
13. The Committee recalled that HSEO’s advice in a previous meeting that prolonged exposure to noise level of around 100dB would be risky to health.
14. Prof KY Tam would like to know more about the alternative promotional activities that were discussed by the students and reasons for their being considered not workable. He asked if the University could offer any assistance to make them workable.
15. Mr Jethro Wong reported that considerations were made to alternatives such as conducting chanting at the soccer pitch or holding a competition for promoting the cabinets. Yet, none were preferred by the student societies. Mr Tim Tsang supplemented that chanting at the soccer pitch could not attract audience and hence would not be an effective way.

Action

16. Prof KY Tam expressed that it appeared more of a preference issue than a feasibility issue and prompted student groups to test out alternatives and avoid pre-matured decision on the effectiveness of any alternatives. He also reminded students of the need to address the concern revealed in the survey. Though not the majority, a significant portion of the campus population had expressed that they did not like the idea of chanting. As a responsible group, we must respect and address concerns, even if it was from the minority.
17. Prof King Chow expressed that his major concern was the noise level, as the survey had already indicated that a good number of respondents did not support the current activity and that noise was an issue. Also, it would mean that chanting would not be the most effective way in serving the purpose of promoting new cabinet. Whilst the new regulation restricting current executive committee member might help, he wondered if the rest of the university would be supportive of a longer chanting duration and a higher noise level as proposed this time.
18. Mr Tim Tsang expressed that student societies thought that setting the standard at 90dB was not fair to them and hence SU had proposed 95dB to provide some leeway.
19. Prof King Chow appreciated SU's effort in conveying the opinions of student societies and reminded them that they were also accountable towards the rest of the student community, including those who expressed concern towards chanting. The noise level by decibels was figurative when compared with the respect we showed to other community members. Prof Chow urged the student societies to reconsider their stances.

The need for alternative promotion activities

20. The Chairperson expressed his disappointment with the proposal because it had not honored the understanding of providing alternative plans which was reached with immense difficulty last year. The current proposal only included a basic plan which the Chairman felt it hard to proceed the motion. He suggested that SU could include some variety in the promotion activities e.g. conduct one week of chanting and include other activities at other venues such as the lawn outside LG7, the Piazza, etc.
21. Prof Roger Cheng echoed the Chairman's view saying that he cast his vote last year on the understanding that there would be alternatives this year such as youtube clips, competitions, stage performances, etc. He also suggested students to test out alternatives in preparation for the 334 transition in 2012-13 where different scenarios were anticipated with the expansion of the campus and addition of new buildings.
22. Prof Kristiaan Helen suggested student groups to draw reference to promotional activities at other sister institutions to explore other effective ways. Mr Jethro Wong indicated that current activities were similar to that at Chinese University but due to geographical and other physical differences, students were more spread out at the Chinese University. Mr Tim Tsang also indicated that activities at the University of Hong Kong may not be applicable at HKUST due to other structural differences and limitations.

Action

23. Prof KY Tam enquired about SU's response to the concerns of university members who do not agree with chanting and queried whether SU had decided to ignore their opinion by proposing chanting as the only activity for the upcoming campaign. Mr Tim Tsang explained that they had considered the voices against chanting and included stricter rules for student societies in the current proposal to minimize the noise impact while preserving the culture to chant. Mr Jethro Wong also shared that they felt there was a strong reason to change and had tried their best to convince student societies to plan alternatives. Yet, student societies thought otherwise.
24. Mr Jack Ho expressed that SU and student societies should try new ways. Without trying, it would be hard to say that new ways were not effective. For example, It would be interesting to have promotion competitions which could be extended to all sister institutions and became a joint university event. Another example might be different activities (chanting, competition, presentation, etc) on different days of the week.
25. Mr Tim Tsang indicated that similar ideas were discussed with student societies but there might be difficulty for student groups to secure outside sponsorships to support the alternative activities. Prof KY Tam appreciated their effort and stated that the University would be supportive of new ideas with an open mind as long as SU would take the courageous step to try new promotional methods that supplement current practices and address minority voices.
26. Miss Irene Chau also indicated that she agreed with the need for alternatives.
27. Mr Jack Ho added he understood that SU needed to strike a balance between the different interests. However, he thought SU should consider other alternatives which students might find they like them and appreciated SU's effort in leading the change.
28. The Chairman suggested that the student bodies considered trying out new promotional elements in 2012. If the new initiatives did not work out as good as anticipated, then they would have evidence to support that alternatives did not work.
29. Dr Grace Au suggested that student societies consider utilizing the lawn outside LG7 during lunch hours. Students having lunch would likely be attracted and be drawn out from the LG7 catering area.
30. Prof Roger Cheng encouraged student groups to revisit the aims behind the chanting culture and sought multiple approaches towards achieving these aims. If the aim was to demonstrate student groups' commitment, then it might not need to be a display at the Atrium. If the aim was for promoting the group, then other medium, e.g. an youtube clip, might be useful. For the latter, student's involvement could be encouraged through voting and other incentives such as luck draw for all voters.

Purpose of chanting

31. Mr Tim Wang indicated that they appreciated the ideas suggested by the Committee. He further shared that the aims of using chanting as the key promotional activity during the Student Election Campaign were:
 - i. It helped show the commitment of the new committee on whether they could work as a team during the promotional period. It would be an indicator for the existing committee.
 - ii. It helped inform all student members that a new committee would be coming

Action

- to serve students in the coming year. It also helped inform student members about the new committee's performance, as indicated through chanting, so that student members could vote for them accordingly.
- iii. It would be a live show that allowed the new committee to be in touch with student members face-to-face.

Balancing different interests of the campus community

32. Prof KY Tam reiterated the need to address concerns of students as revealed from the survey. He understood the challenge for SU to be caught in the midst of different views. However, as future leaders, it would be imperative that SU practised incorporating different views and ideas within the community and attended to concerns of both the majority and the minority because even a minority of 25% of the university would mean around 2,500 community members who felt they were suffering for three weeks during the campaign. He asked if SU could provide an answer to the minority.
33. Prof King Chow also suggested conducting forums for students who were not participating in any student societies and collect their views. He also extended on Prof Tam's point of the need for leaders to propose resolutions that incorporate and balance views of both the majority and the minority. Prof Chow shared that some students told him of their intention to put up big character posts regarding banning chanting. There were also alumni, who were active student society members, who asked why students were still doing what they said they would not do anymore.

The way forward

34. The Chairman proposed for SU to work on incorporating some alternatives to complement the current proposal so that there would be more than one promotional activity in the proposal. The Committee offered to find ways to support SU financially if justified. The Chairman hoped that SU would understand it would be difficult for him to move a motion to support SU's current proposal (CSA/49/1) if the basis of support to include alternatives, as outlined earlier in 2011, had not been honored. This was unanimous among all members.
35. Prof KY Tam also volunteered to meet with student societies to discuss and offer incentives necessary for including alternative promotional activities as justified.
36. Prof King Chow encouraged SU to rethink and envision, as leaders of the student body, the student-led activities they would want HKUST to have as a process for student societies and for student's learning. Mr Tim Tsang promised to further discuss with student societies about this matter

Next Meeting

37. Considering the tight time schedule, the Chairman proposed another meeting in early January to consider SU's revised proposal.

All
Members

(There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:21pm.)