Committee on Student Affairs

Minutes of the 42nd Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs held on 18 Mar 2010 at 11:30 am at Room 7342.

Present : Prof Karl Tsim (Chairman), Prof Kar-Yan Tam, Prof Tai-Kai Ng, Prof King Chow, Prof Chi-Ming Chan, Prof Charles Chan, Prof Kristiaan Helsen, Mr Benson Leung (representing Mr Timothy Tsang Kam-Tim), Mr Ken Tsui Hin-Kan, Dr Grace Au (Member and Secretary)

By Invitation: Director, HSEO
Director, FMO
A faculty member
Acting President, HKUSTSU, 2009-2010
Nominated President, Internal Vice-President and UA Secretary (Ignite, Nominated Cabinet of the Exco of HKUSTSU for Session 2010-11)
Nominated President and Internal Vice-President (Renaissance, Nominated Cabinet of the Exco of HKUSTSU for Session 2010-11)

Absent with apologies: Miss Kelly Chan Ying-Tung, Mr Timothy Tsang Kam-Tim

In Attendance: Mrs Pandora Yuen, Ms Codana Chan, SAO

Action

Confirmation of Minutes of Last Two Meetings

1. Minutes of the 40th and 41st Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs were confirmed.

Review of Student Societies Election Campaign in Feb 2010

2. The Chairman thanked the SU Acting President, representatives from the two nominated SU cabinets (Ignite and Renaissance), faculty and staff members who attended the meeting upon invitation to share their views on the issues related to the election campaign of the student societies.

3. A Report on Student Societies Election Campaign 2010 was tabled, and background information on the issues given. It was noted that around 50 student societies conducted campaign activities including counter promotion, chanting at Atrium during 12:45pm – 2:00 pm, greeting/saying goodbye at Piazza during 6 pm-7 pm from 8 Feb to 3 Mar 2010. A layout plan of the Atrium was attached to the Report showing the areas which were to be kept clear of activities. It was reported that 11 written and 8 verbal complaints had been received mainly on noise disturbance, blockage of passages and safety concerns. A total of 26 written warnings had been issued to students and 2 societies had been banned from using communal areas for 3 months.

Action

4. The Chairman invited Prof Joe Kwan, Director of Health, Safety and Environment to provide information on the noise level of the chanting activities. It was reported that all measurements of noise level at the chanting areas exceeded the university limit of 79db during lunch time (94 db – 104 db). It was pointed out that occupational limit was 85 db while environmental limit 65 db. The noise level would pose risk, such as temporary hearing impairment and temporary threshold shift to those directly involved in the chanting activities. Compared with the measurements in the past, this year was the first time that over 100 db had been recorded.

5. It was pointed out that noise at the Atrium had always been an issue because of its physical design. There were classrooms and offices directly around and above the Atrium. Taking note that the Atrium was a popular venue for student activities and to facilitate student life, the university had installed glass screens on the 4/F facing the Atrium to minimize the noise impact to teaching in the classrooms at this location.

6. It was noted that chanting was originated some 10 years ago when for the first time there were 2 SU cabinets competing. At that time, the 2 cabinets greeted their fellow students good morning. This practice in later years developed into cheering and chanting. In the early years, chanting was mild and in general tolerated by the campus community. However, it had escalated in recent years to such extent that the noise disturbance was seriously affecting normal life of the campus. In 2005, this Committee discussed the issue with the SU representatives. It was agreed that campaign period should be no more than 3 weeks and chanting restricted to lunch time with the understanding that students would exercise self-discipline and not cause too much disturbance to the campus community. This year, the SU requested an additional period to say goodbye during 6- 7 pm and this Committee agreed for this to be held at the Piazza for one-year trial, subject to self-monitoring by the SU.

7. The Chairman then invited the students to share their views. The student representatives from Ignite expressed the view that students through chanting and other campaign activities promoted their team spirit and to show their unity. They explained that apart from trying to gain votes, chanting was meant to be like a festival to provide an atmosphere for students to build up unity. The student representatives from Renaissance also added that chanting was an important and indispensible means for students to demonstrate their effort to do the best and to show the power of team spirit.

8. On safety concerns such as over-crowdedness and pushing of each other, the student representatives of Ignite explained that some bodily contact was unavoidable in a competitive environment, but there was never any intention of violence. Students just wanted to do their best and show that they were the most outstanding among all the others.

Action

9. There was much discussion on the purpose of the chanting activities. A faculty member stated his objective is to promote HKUST as a premier research institution. This includes creating a productive research environment. It also includes making sure visitors have a favorable and pleasant visit to our campus. The faculty member stated he did not understand the students' objectives and asked them to clarify. There was also the observation that not all societies chanted, and those who did not still were well received by others. There was no reason why students should escalate the chanting every year, thinking that the louder the chanting, the more powerful the society. Student representatives from Ignite said that students' goal was to have an all-rounded education and that participation in student activities was an important means in achieving the goal. They explained that the purpose of chanting was for students to show their presence and a readiness to serve their fellow students. The Student representatives of Renaissance expressed the view that chanting was to show how much the students love their societies and the university should facilitate these activities which were for unity of the student body as a whole.

10. There was then discussion on ways and means to solve the chanting issue. Some members proposed to move chanting to LG7 or the soccer pitch at the Seafront. This had been raised to students before but was rejected. The reason was that the student societies wanted to stick to the Atrium because the human traffic there makes it the only location to achieve the highest visibility.

11. The student representatives from Ignite and Renaissance had other views. They said that since students were only allowed to chant during lunch hours, all chanting concentrated during this period resulting in excessive noise. If there was no restriction to the chanting time, then chanting would be spread out and less noise generated. Further arrangements such as allocating chanting time slots and limiting the number of students in the chanting could also help to control the noise. However, there was concern about how the time slots could be fairly allocated as every society wanted the prime time for chanting. There was another suggestion to have a one-day festival-like event instead, in which students could do all the chanting and promotion activities as they wish.

12. Some members suggested students to reflect on the problems brought about by correlating chanting loudly to student power; and to explore other means to show student strength. Students were also asked to consider taking care of the interest of those students and staff who were affected by the noise level. The student representatives of Ignite and Renaissance reiterated their view that chanting was important for it could demonstrate students' enthusiasm and love for the student societies.

13. Prof Kwan further reminded members of the safety concerns, in that the blockage of passages, some temporary installations not meeting the safety requirements, such as exposed electrical wires, could be hazardous.

Action

14. On the issue of blockage of passageways, the SU was asked to share their experience of monitoring and controlling the situation. Mr Ivan So responded that the SU did play the monitoring role. However, their rules were applicable to the proposed cabinets, and not to other students such as past executive members who might have chanted impromptu or the bystanders who gathered around the restricted areas.

15. In order to better understand the views of all members of the campus community including students, faculty and staff on the campaign activities, the Chairman suggested SU to initiate a survey to collect views and feedback. Mr Ivan So was positive to this suggestion. It was reiterated that the Committee was not against the campaign activities, but that excessive chanting had caused problems affecting the health of students and other members of the campus community that a solution was deemed necessary.

(The Acting SU President, the student representatives of Ignite and Renaissance, faculty and staff members left the meeting after being thanked by the Chairman for their views and suggestions.)

16. The Committee continued to discuss the subject and agreed that information collected through a survey would be very useful for the Committee and the campus community to further discuss the issue. It was noted that the SU new executive committee was about to be elected and once they took up office, SAO would work with them in conducting the survey for the whole campus community.

Student Activities Involving Outsiders

17. Members discussed the issue of using student amenities for student activities which involved outsiders as detailed in paper CSA/42/2. Members noted that the purpose of providing the amenities was for learning and recreation of our own students. It was believed that through organizing their own activities, students could develop their abilities such as leadership skills, team work and so on. However, there were occasions in that some outsiders might have made use of the amenities for commercial activities while the only involvement of the student society was to secure the booking of the venue. It was further noted that university space was for educational and research purpose and student activities involving commercial elements were not allowed except the Mega Sale organized by SU once every Semester.

18. After discussion, the Committee supported the recommendations in Paper CSA/42/2 that activities for outsiders should not use the SAO facilities, except those related to requirement of academic /co-curricular programs. The Committee also agreed that in case special approval was given for such activities to use the SAO facilities, a fee should be charged in accordance with the proposed fee schedule in the paper, which was in line with the charges of LTs and classrooms.

(The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 pm.)