

## Committee on Student Affairs

Minutes of the 50th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs held on 18 January 2012 at 9 pm at Room 7342.

- Present : Prof Karl Tsim (Chairman), Prof Kar-Yan Tam, Prof Roger Cheng, Prof Tai-Kai Ng, Prof Kristiaan Helsen, Prof Kevin Tam, Mr Ferris Chung, Miss Irene Chau, Mr Jethro Wong, Dr Grace Au (Member and Secretary)
- By Invitation : Mr Tsang Ka-Long Tim, President, HKUSTSU
- Absent with apologies: Prof King Chow, Miss Louise Pang
- In Attendance : Mrs Pandora Yuen (SAO), Mr Raymond Tang (SAO), Ms Daisy Kwan (SAO)

### Action

#### Welcoming

1. The Chairman welcomed Prof Kevin Tam, Mr Ferris Chung, and Mr Jethro Wong who joined the Committee on Student Affairs (CSA) as members for the first time and thanked Prof Kristiaan Helsen and Miss Irene Chau for their continued service at the Committee.

#### Confirmation of Minutes of Last Meeting

2. Minutes of the 49th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs was confirmed on condition of amendment to typo for point 34.

#### Background for New Members

3. The Chairman invited Mrs Pandora Yuen to provide a brief recapitulation of previous discussions and the evolution of chanting being the key activity in the Student Election Campaign. In recent years, chanting has become an issue because the excessive noise and blockage have caused disturbance to campus members. The issue was first brought to CSA for discussion in October 2005. Different measures were implemented but 39% of campus members still indicated they do not support chanting to be part of student election activities.
4. CSA had continued to advise SU on their proposal for the Student Election Campaign 2012. Two communication meetings had been held with students on 9 and 12 January 2012 respectively. The aim was to directly communicate with student groups about the need to address concerns of other university members and discuss alternative promotion measures. In total, CSA met over 100 representatives from about 40 student societies.

#### Student Societies Election Campaign February 2012

##### SU's proposal

5. Mr Jethro Wong presented SU's revised proposal for the Student Election Campaign 2012 (CSA/50/1). Options to the duration of chanting sessions (3 for noon session and 2 for evening session) were included. New alternative promotion measures, namely a video promotion competition and saying "good morning" at the Piazza before 9 am, would be piloted this year. Mr Wong explained that SU and student societies were hesitant to cut down current chanting activities this year without knowing the effectiveness of the alternatives. He also stressed on the implementation of more stringent monitoring measures.

Clarifications on the Proposal

6. Prof Kevin Tam and Prof Roger Cheng sought clarification on the baseline average noise level and the rationale behind raising the noise level from 90dB in 2011 to 95 dB in 2012. Mr Jethro Wong explained that reference was made to the Environmental Protection Department Noise Control Guidelines for Holding Open Air Entertainment Activities. The baseline noise level of the background, which was 86-87dB, was taken during normal lunch hour.
7. Responding to the Chairman, Mr Jethro Wong indicated that the noise level for the noon chanting session at the Election Campaign in 2011 was around 92dB. SU was of the opinion that noise disturbances in 2011 were due to violation of rules and failure to comply with warning. Hence SU were proposing more stringent regulations this year with strengthened enforcement. Dr Grace Au shared that it was very difficult to enforce when students got excited with the chanting.
8. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about changes to the layout whereby removing the direct passageway, Mr Jethro Wong explained that observations from the 2011 Campaign showed passersby rarely use the passageway between chanting areas, hence SU proposed to group all chanting areas together.
9. Dr Grace Au enquired about SU's view in terms of improvement in the chanting arrangement. Mr Jethro Wong said spreading out the chanting area would help lower the noise level and the new regulations that prevent current executive members to stand in restricted areas could help avoid blockage. This would allow university members to pass through quickly without being trapped in a noisy surrounding.
10. Prof Tai-Kai Ng enquired how SU could be sure that noise issue would be improved with the entire setting being similar to that of last year which resulted in many complaints. Mr Jethro Wong expressed it might be feasible to lower the level to 92dB. He shared that it had been hard to convince student groups to settle with a lower average noise level because majority did not think that chanting had contributed to the noise level given the strong background noise.
11. Miss Irene Chau said there was not much difference between setting the limit at 92dB as compared with 95 dB.
12. Mr Ferris Chung said it was not reasonable to raise average noise level to 95dB.

Discussion on Alternative Promotional Activities

13. The Chairman shared with members the alternatives brought up during the communication meetings on 9 and 12 January 2012:
  - a. Conducting chanting for 2 full days each of 8 hours at any campus locations;
  - b. Conducting other activities such as stage performances, contests, YouTube clips or social networking-based competitions to complement chanting;
  - c. Conducting different face-to-face promotion activities on different days of the week, e.g. chanting on Tuesdays and Thursdays and other activities such as stage performances on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays;
  - d. Relocating fully or partially to other locations such as the soccer pitch, the lawn area outside LG7; and
  - e. Relocating 2 – 3 of the 5 chanting areas away from the center of the Atrium to other locations such as the Piazza.
14. Members enquired the rationale for student groups to reject the option of fewer days but longer duration every day. Mr Jethro Wong explained that student societies wanted students to see them chant.

Discussion on Noise and Blockage Issues

15. Members expressed concern over raising the dB limit. Prof Kristiaan Helsen also reminded members about the exponential effect of dB increment.
16. Dr Grace Au reiterated that it would be difficult for the University to accept raising the average noise level given the number of complaints received. Experience also showed that regulation and control would be hard on the spot once excitement was built up among students. Dr Au prompted SU to consider decreasing the number of participants per chanting area during the noon session and suggested the evening session to start at 5:55pm to avoid clashing with the staff buses departing at 5:45pm.
17. Prof KY Tam also shared that SU had not been effective in regulating the situations in 2011. Observations indicated it would be risky for any intervention as it might lead to physical confrontation which none would like to happen.
18. The Chairman expressed understanding towards SU's proposal but prompted Mr Jethro Wong to reconsider the content of the proposal and evaluate if changes could be made to the location of the chanting area, the number of participants per area, and the level of noise, that could positively address the issues.
19. Members enquired about the number of penalties and warnings being issued last year. Mr Jethro Wong expressed that there were only a few during the first few days of the campaign. The Chairman strongly recommended that SU to exercise their authority and strengthen their regulatory role during the campaign.

Motion to Support the SU proposal

20. Mr Jethro Wong proposed a motion to support the final SU Proposal with the average noise level being reduced from 95dB to 90 dB – the same level set for last year's campaign. Mr Wong also pledged to ascertain SU's implementation of regulatory measures with the aim to reduce the noise and blockage. SU would also pilot the alternative measures namely internet promotion and morning greeting at the Piazza.
21. The motion was seconded by Prof Kevin Tam.
22. The motion was put to the vote. With 4 yeas, 4 nays and 1 abstention from members, the Chairman cast his vote in favor of the motion. The motion was carried on the following conditions:
  - a. Allow chanting in the Atrium this year as detailed in the proposal of SU with average noise level set at 90dB;
  - b. SU should seriously enforce the stated regulatory measures to ensure that noise level was under control and diligently implement the new alternative promotion measures; and
  - c. Any future proposal on chanting by SU or student societies will be considered with reference to views of the campus community on the 2012 exercise, which is to be collected by various means such as another survey, and the outcome of the alternative promotion measures.

(There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 am.)