Present: Kristen Ablauf, David Deeg, Louis Green, James Hines, Sioban Harlow, Kevin Kolben, Mimi Pledl (Committee staff), Larry Root, Steven Rosenberg,

Absent: Rob Howse, Veronica Johnson

The Committee discussed several issues that had emerged over the summer and then considered actions for the upcoming year, based on the recommendations developed as part of last year’s final report.

New Era Cap Company. The Committee discussed the current status of allegations raised about New Era Cap Company, headquartered in New York, with production in New York and Alabama. Based on worker complaints, the WRC carried out a preliminary investigation, concluding that concerns about worker safety and possible interference with the rights of workers to affiliate with a union of their choice warranted further investigation. New Era did not choose to participate in this preliminary investigation.

The Committee, through our director of licensing, requested that the Collegiate Licensing Company, as our legal agent in our relationship to licensees, request that New Era respond specifically to the allegations. The president of New Era responded in a letter to Bruce Siegal of the CLC. He contends that New Era is not in violation of labor standards, itemizing their status under the provisions of the FLA workplace code of conduct.

New Era’s Derby plant, the focus of the complaints, is currently on strike and there are governmental efforts underway seeking to resolve the dispute. The Committee decided to await further information about the ongoing interventions by the National Labor Relations Board and OSHA. A question was raised about whether a WRC investigation could add to or improve upon the investigations of the NLRB and OSHA. On the other hand, it was noted that a company could be considered to be violating the spirit of a code provision without necessarily violating the law.

Licensees Joining the FLA. The FLA has provided a list of licensees who have not chosen to join the FLA, 18 of whom are UM licensees. The Committee suggested that these licensees be contacted to ascertain why they not done so. It was suggested that contact could be made by either the University, the CLC, or the FLA. The Chair will contact the FLA about this.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the FLA and the WRC. The Committee discussed how we should assess the effectiveness of participation in the FLA and the WRC. It was noted that annual fees cost the University about $30,000 for each organization. It was suggested that we speak with representatives of each of these two organizations concerning their current operation and future plans with the goal of developing criteria for assessing these memberships.

The chair is to make arrangements for meeting, via conference call, with representatives of the FLA and the WRC.

Public Disclosure of Manufacturing Sites. The WRC continues to work on providing centralized information about manufacturing sites for licensees of participating schools. The University of Michigan has authorized the CLC to share its information with the WRC as part of this effort.

University Code of Conduct. The Committee noted the need to continue to examine its code of conduct for licensees. One particular area of interest was the standard relating to mandatory overtime, an area in which the University of Michigan code clearly differs from that of the FLA and the CLC. The Committee discussed the origins of the University’s 60-hour absolute limit on mandatory overtime. It was suggested that the Committee should seek systematic information about cross-national regulation of hours and common practices in relevant industries. This could present a useful research project for a graduate student or group of students and provide a basis for continued consideration of this issue.

Monitoring Compliance with Labor Standards. Monitoring adherence to the University’s code of conduct represents a continuing challenge. Membership in the FLA provides one mechanism for setting up a monitoring system. The investigatory role that the WRC has identified for itself presents another resource. An explication of this role should be a central part of our assessment of the memberships. If there are monitoring mechanisms in place, are additional efforts needed right now?

It was also suggested that developing a “monitoring forum” in the Winter could provide an important opportunity for campus-wide discussion of issues of monitoring.

Internships for Students. The Committee talked about developing more internship opportunities related to issues relevant to labor standards. Verite had offered some possibilities at the end of last year. There may be other possibilities through groups on campus, such as the International Institute or the Center for International Business Education (Business School).

The next meeting is scheduled for Oct 19.