Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights  
University of Michigan  

Minutes: Meeting of October 25, 2002  
President’s Conference Room  
2065 Fleming Administration Building

Present: Kristen Ablauf, Louis Green, Sioban Harlow (vice chair), Lauren Heidtke, Veronica Johnson, Larry Root (chair), Emily Squires, 
Kathy Terrell, Ada Verloren (staff to committee), and Matt Wittman

Absent: Mary Gallagher

Guests: Mary Sue Coleman, President of the University; Marvin Krislov, General Counsel

Discussion of Committee Role and Goals. After introductions, the committee discussed its recent activities and potential directions for the future. There was a general discussion of ways in which the university’s teaching and research capabilities can be used to raise awareness of labor standards and human rights. These include public forums as well as programs within the curriculum to expand understanding of these issues.

The general consensus was that the University of Michigan’s long-standing interdisciplinary focus placed it in an exceptional position to address these issues. It was noted that at the end of last year, the committee discussed the training needs or monitors and how the university might address this role, combining aspects of human rights, labor relations, and occupational health and safety. The committee discussed internship opportunities for students and the possibility of establishing a program to prepare students for a career as monitors.

Several internships have been established through Verite, the first monitoring organization to receive accreditation from the Fair Labor Association (FLA). It was noted, however, that these internships were expensive, including a $6,000 fee and travel costs. Educational opportunities are also available for students participating in ILIR’s Labor and Global Change program, which has provided small grants to faculty-student teams for research in countries such as Cambodia and Mexico. There are also programs in the School of Public Policy and Business Administration that may be relevant to these goals.

President Coleman recounted the experience of the University of Iowa, one of the early members of both the Fair Labor Association (FLA) and the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). The university found that it could benefit from both memberships because of the different strategies of the two organizations. On the whole, the university improved its dialogue with licensees. President Coleman recognized that the University of Michigan is seen as a leader in advancing the issues of human rights and labor standards, and urged the committee to continue to look for internship opportunities for students.

Marvin Krislov offered the assistance of the Office of the General Counsel to the committee where needed. He also suggested that educating smaller licensees might be an important task for the FLA so that they know what their obligations are and how to enforce them. It was noted that in its first two years the Committee has been going through a period of learning and reacting to, but that it has now reached a stage where it can be proactive.

Membership in the WRC and the FLA. It was noted that it is time for renewal of the university’s membership in these organizations. These memberships currently represent the principal means for oversight and enforcement of the university’s commitment to a code of conduct. Committee members discussed the roles of these two organizations as complementary. Although both organizations have evolved since their founding, they both retain distinct approaches. The FLA focuses on internal and external monitoring, developed in consultation with companies and the WRC focuses on addressing problems identified through the worker complaints. The annual costs of participating in these two organizations costs the university approximately $30,000 each (1% of licensing revenues for each organization).

Last year, the committee reviewed the contributions of both the WRC and the FLA to the university’s efforts in this area. As part of this effort, both organizations responded to a set of questions posed by the committee (copies will be circulated to current committee members). The committee will review these materials and make a recommendation to the administration about continued membership. It was also suggested that the committee obtain and review financial reports from both of the organizations in order to understand more fully their operations.

New Era Cap Company. The committee discussed the situation of New Era. The university terminated licensing arrangements with the company last spring because of their lack of responsiveness to the allegations raised by the WRC concerning violations of labor standards (freedom of association and health/safety). Since that time, New Era has cooperated with the WRC in their investigation and addressed issues of concern to both the WRC and to the local union. The strike at the Derby plant has ended and the union has urged universities to resume licensing relationships. The WRC issued a positive report on progress at the company and the president of the company has formally requested the university to consider resuming its licensing relationship.

The committee requested to have this documentary information forwarded again (it had not gone to the new members). On the basis of these developments, the committee decided to recommend that the university consider renewing its licensing relationship with New Era, with the understanding that committee members would have the opportunity to review these materials and communicate any concerns that may arise.

Next Meeting. The next meeting of the committee will be on November 22, from 10:00 AM to noon.