President’s Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights
October 28, 2008, 2-4pm
Great Lakes North Boardroom, Palmer Commons

MINUTES

Attending: Amy Cocuzza, Brad Farnsworth, Siobán Harlow (Chair) via conference phone, Allen Hicken, Peter Jacobson, Gary Krenz, Brian Talbot, Ada Verloren, Leigh Wedenoja, Nancy Vander Kuyl (staff to committee).

Absent: Kristen Ablauf, Matthew Welch

1. Welcome and history of the committee

   Siobán Harlow welcomed the members of the committee and provided a short history of the committee and its activities. Committee members received copies of the 2008 Fall Charge, Code of Conduct, Operational Procedures, List of Contacts and the 2007-2008 Report to the President.

2. Introductions of committee members

   The committee this year brings together a variety of faculty and students with experiences and expertise on matters of labor standards and human rights. Committee members introduced themselves and gave a short statement about their interest in international labor standards and related issues. Committee members have expertise in areas such as international labor standards, human rights, manufacturing supply chain issues, globalization, occupational safety and health, protecting environmental resources, economics, public health and epidemiology, and monitoring international labor standards.

3. President Coleman’s 2008-2009 Charge to the LSHR advisory committee

   Gary Krenz, on behalf of President Coleman thanked members of the committee for their willingness to serve on this advisory committee. He then reviewed the charge from President Coleman. Modifications to the charge this year include an increased focus on the promotion of educational opportunities and on institutional operational leadership. The President has also requested that the committee reflect on the role and function of the advisory committee and evaluate if the procedures as written are sufficient, consider ways to broaden the role of research and education in line with the University’s mission, and consider how we as an institution can best promote our values with respect to labor standards and human rights.

4. Education Mission -

   The chair indicated that this charge will be discussed at greater length at the November meeting. The Center for Ethics in Public Life has invited us to propose a topic for one of the Winter ’09 forums and committee members were asked to bring potential topics to the next meeting.

   The chair asked members to consider approaches to enhancing curricular and experiential opportunities including co-funding of courses that include an experiential learning component, seminars for seniors, honors seminars, lecture courses for freshmen to introduce issues early in their college experience, courses for licensees through the business school to build their capacity to comply with codes of conduct. Farnsworth indicated that the Center for International Business Education (CIBE) may be able to co-fund initiatives. Participants in the Cambodian Law Project may be available to speak to the broader UM community about their experiences.

   Hicken requested that we first a) identify what courses are currently offered on campus related to the topics of labor, labor standards, globalization and trade, and development, and b) identify what relevant travel programs are currently offered. Wedenoja suggested that it may be more important to focus on on-campus courses and that more curricular offerings/dialogue about ethical purchasing would be of value. Talbot suggested we may wish to focus attention this year on how the current financial crisis will affect human rights and environmental protections in international settings.

5. Operational Leadership Mission

   The chair provided background on the UM’s involvement with a pilot program through the CLC – the Corporate Social Responsibility and Supply Chain Compliance Questionnaire & efforts to include assessment of code of conduct compliance as part of licensing decisions. Kristen Ablauf will provide an update at the November meeting.
6. Updates on FLA and WRC
The FLA has successfully completed the pilot phase of the Enhanced Licensee Program and plans to roll-out the program for all licensees this fall.
The WRC’s annual report was distributed to committee members by email. Scott Nova, the executive director will resign effective 3/1/09 to lead another labor rights organization.

7. Compliance issue: Jerzees de Honduras (closing of one of its factories)
The committee discussed the recent memos from the WRC and the FLA concerning Jerzees de Honduras, a factory operated by Russell Athletic, a UM Licensee. The history of labor issues and code of conduct violations at this factory and at Jerzees Choloma. A remediation plan had been in place. The committee discussed the concerns raised in the 10/10/08 letter from WRC about plans to close the factory and allegations of interference with employees’ rights to association, and the 10/21/08 letter from WRC responding to points made by Russell Athletics. The FLA has requested an independent audit of the decision to close the factory. Wedenoja reported that SOLE members had participated in a conference call with USAS and workers from the factory, where similar concerns about the motivation for plant closure and anti-union activity. The committee discussed potential actions that the committee should take based on this information and our established procedures. It was agreed that a letter would be sent informing the Company that UM was aware of the concerns being brought up by the WRC and the FLA and requesting information about the situation. The UM has a three year contract signed in March but UM has the right to let the contract expire at the end of any year of the contract. The chair will draft a letter by the end of the week and distribute for review by the committee.

9. The committee will meet next on Friday November 21 from 8:30-10am.