

Government Affairs Committee Annual Report 2007

The Ohio State University Senate

The Senate Government Affairs Committee has the following Duties and Responsibilities:
“Provide insight and advice to the office of government relations and to the university senate on specific issues. Facilitate communication among the university governance institutions and the office of government relations regarding local, state, and federal issues affecting the university. In consultation with the office of government relations, build relationships with various organizations and constituencies.”

STEM initiatives

Efforts to ramp up k-16 education in STEM disciplines – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics – are important as Ohio moves into a knowledge-based economy, and will have an impact on OSU. Government Affairs’ committee members participated in a number of related events regarding STEM initiatives.

The first was the *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* convocation in Washington, D.C., September, 2006. This event, hosted by the National Academies, involved multiple concurrent sessions on different aspects of science education and economic competitiveness. A particularly useful part of the convocation was a regional group discussion (Ohio and Pennsylvania) led by OSU Senior Vice President for Research, Robert T. McGrath. It was concluded that there were many practices in place that could be shared to attract students to science, enthuse them, and motivate students for enquiry and innovation. Those who influence policy need more coordination with those who carry out policy, and STEM education must be connected/aligned with development. Continued collaboration and timeous follow-up among academia, business, and government is essential for further progress.

The other STEM related events involving members of the Government Affairs committee included the appearance of U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, outlining the Spellings’ Commission Report and federal STEM initiatives, and the presentation of *Science and Mathematics* by the Education Policy Advisory Council, co-chaired by OSU President Karen Holbrook.

The Government Affairs Committee recognizes the importance of these initiatives to OSU and to the state of Ohio, but also recognizes that non-STEM disciplines are extremely important as well, and must be given strong emphasis. In the words of the Ohio Academy of Science Board of Trustees: “STEM should not be set aside for the social context with other subjects.”

State Board of Education

In addition to STEM issues, the State Board of Education’s Achievements Committee considered whether or not to adopt new language in Ohio’s k-12 science standards regarding “Controversial

Issues.” According to the Board, these issues included evolution, global warming, and stem-cell research. They considered adopting a generic “Controversial Issues Template” but were under pressure to drop consideration of the Template and replacement language in the science standards. In October, 2006, the full Board voted to discharge the Achievements Committee from considering the template and the replacement language. The Government Affairs Committee continues to monitor activities on the Board, and will have to be vigilant next year as the Ohio Department of Education and the State Board of Education review the academic content standards of science.

Intellectual Diversity

It was noted that the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) failed in their attempt in Montana to legislate an equivalent to the Academic Bill of Rights (SB 24) that came to Ohio last year. We continue to monitor such attempts to undermine academic freedom.

Diversity and Government

What began as a proactive look at impacts of immigration legislation on OSU turned into a useful session involving the Senate Diversity Committee with the Government Affairs Committee.

Particularly urgent was consideration of the passage in Michigan of “Issue 2,” part of a nationwide campaign to outlaw affirmative action. Whereas Ohio is not a current target for such a campaign, nine other states are currently listed by the “American Civil Rights Institute.” The combined committee noted that there is not reason to believe that Ohio may not be a future target, particularly in a presidential election year. Educating Ohioans on the values of diversity in higher education, and in general, topped the list of priorities to stave off such legislation in Ohio.

It was noted that the “comprehensive immigration reform,” at the time coming up, and now in full debate in congress, could affect foreign students. So far the visa components are working reasonably well for students, and this must be maintained. Also of concern is the backlash in some states against in-state tuition rates being offered to illegal immigrants. The federal DREAM act – Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors – which addresses this issue, is stalled in congress. Ten states, not including Ohio, have approved legislation to extend in-state tuition status to undocumented students, whereas three other states have explicitly restricted access to the lower tuition rates.

Board of Regents

While generally supportive of the appointment of the Chancellor of the Board of Regents by the Governor, there is concern that the Board must not jeopardize the autonomy of the universities, particularly regarding Ph.D. degree programs.

Funding Higher Education

The university continues to work with the Ohio’s governor and legislators regarding funding of higher education. A common theme from the RAGS conference, and a concern here in Ohio, is that it will be difficult to fund both k-12 educational improvements *and* provide adequate funds for state universities. From the OSU perspective, it is important that future funding formulae are

based on the cost of education (particularly at a research institution) rather than just the number of students.

Structure and function of the Government Affairs Committee

The committee considered proposing updates to the rules for the function and composition of future committees. Options ranged from becoming a virtual committee that would only assemble when particular issues arise, to expanding the committee to include a delegate from the University Staff Advisory Committee. The discussion arose because it is rare for the committee to act, such it did last year in proposing a Senate resolution regarding the TEL initiative. On the other hand, the committee felt that keeping the lines of communication open on a regular basis would help us keep track of current developments and anticipate necessary actions in the future. Next year's committee will need to find a way to optimize both efficiency and effectiveness.

Respectfully Submitted,

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