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Minutes of the Black Curriculum Committee.

Tuesday, October 29, 1968, 12:15 - 1:50, Sharples Dining Hall.

Members present: Mr. Pierson, Mr. Van Til, Mr. Legesse, Mr. Wright, Mr. Shackford, Don Mizell, Allen Dietrich, Marilyn Allman, Clinton Etheridge. (Nolan Jones sat in).

The meeting consisted of a discussion of the "Report prepared by Clinton Etheridge" being his version of the "Preliminary Proposal" on Black Studies (October 15).

Mr. Pierson asked: should we begin with a short history of the program? Marilyn Allman said that the main point is to give SASS power, formal or not; the origins of the program might be worked into the latter section of the proposal. Mr. Pierson

read a draft of the history: "The Black Studies Curriculum Committee was appointed by President Smith in May, 1968 as an outgrowth of discussions with members of the Swarthmore Afro-American Students Society. In his letter of May 17, 1968 President Smith said: 'I will continue to encourage departments to be considering what studies can appropriately and effectively be made a part of their offering at the earliest opportunity, but it is my hope that your committee will give focus to all of our efforts and see how individual additions to our program may build into some larger and more coherent program.' This report is addressed to the latter issue."

Clint Etheridge said there should be added mention of black discontent on campus and a sense of irrelevancy in the curriculum that motivated the program.

Mr. Wright wanted to know what will be the future constituency of this committee. Suppose the graduating members are not replaced with SASS members. The present students were appointed by President Smith after consultation with the then Student Body President, Kirk Roose. (Kirk Roose and Sam Shepherd, Chairman of SASS, were roommates, so it seems likely that SASS strongly influenced the selection). Mr. Wright said that although SASS precipitated the program, it does not mean that it will necessarily control it.

Mr. Pierson asked: why leave out "careers" from points 1) and 2)? It was agreed to put "careers" back in.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the report were discussed. Mr. Wright objected to "overseeing and consulting" at the end of the third paragraph--"overseeing" includes "consulting". Mr. Pierson suggested that it read: "The Black Curriculum Committee would continue to help implement the program"--the point being that it is not a question of running the program but of keeping the Committee very actively involved in the program. Don Mizell suggested "scrutinizing and consulting".

Mr. Van Til asked why the original 8 departments had been reduced to 4. Mr. Wright said that 8 was unrealistic. Even in International Relations where it is theoretically possible to combine it with either History, Political Science, Economics, or Modern Languages, there is a built in bias favoring Political Science, and, in fact, in the ten years of the program there has been only one major outside of Political Science--in History. Mr. Pierson suggested that the first sentence of paragraph 2 read: "...on the order of the Political Science major with an International Relations concentration." What about "jointly administered"? Mr. Pierson said we could begin by having it administered by Sociology-Anthropology and History. Mr. Van Til said that Economics, Political Science, and English were also central to the program. Keeping those five he would agree to drop Music, Fine Arts, and Psychology. Marilyn Allman suggested we not limit ourselves at the start, we should use some general phrase such as "many relevant areas." Clint Etheridge asked by Philosophy was not included? They had not been approached. Clint will approach Mr. Bennett. Marilyn pointed out that Modern Languages is relevant too, if at some time African languages were to be taught at Swarthmore. We should therefore keep ourselves open to future possibilities.

Mr. Van Til said there are two possible ways of administering the program. First, as in International Relations, students could apply for special concentration to be accepted by a faculty committee. Secondly, there might be no process of admission to the program. It could be open to anyone who, taking a certain number of courses, could have the concentration listed on the graduation program after his major. Some kind of hurdle or rite of passage would probably be necessary-- a thesis or an oral, or both. Mr. Wright objected that "Chemistry--Black Studies" suggests a double major; the concentration must be related to the first major, and, like International Relations, must modify the first major. This would mean that all the social sciences and some of the humanities would be possible as first majors. Mr. Shackford said that since it is highly unlikely that the English Department would offer more than one course in Black Studies, a thesis would have to be required to make a major in English with Black Studies concentration of any significance. Should a thesis be required in all fields? A thesis might be a very good idea, and quite popular, but we should not hamstring ourselves at this point by making it a requirement.

Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report were discussed. Mr. Van Til objected to the prose style, saying that it seemed deliberately written to turn off faculty members and lose support for the program. In the first place, the definition of "black perspective" is confusing. Secondly, does black perspective "transcend skin color and socialization" or does it not--the report contradicts itself. Third, Swarthmore is not a "Quaker" college. Nor is it "white"--it used to be, but it is not longer accurate to say so now ("predominantly white" was suggested). Finally the lines about "sheepskins... ritualistically amassed" is offensive language that will only lose us support.

Mr. Wright had two objections. First, a small liberal arts college should not organize courses from "perspectives" or "points of view". That is the role of sectarian colleges. A liberal arts college should aim for "exposure to perspectives." Secondly, at the end of the fifth paragraph the discussion shifts from "this Committee" to "SASS". Mr. Wright was not at all sure that the Black Curriculum Committee should have influence in making appointments, but he was very sure that SASS should definitely not have a say or be involved in making appointments.

Mr. Pierson pointed out that the President and Board of Managers are the sole authorities in making appointments. Clint asked: did we have any influence last spring on the case of Mr. Herschberg? Mr. Wright answered that while he was willing to discuss the general principles of hiring, he did not feel free to discuss details of particular cases with this committee. Mr. Wright said that a problem that might arise is that SASS would boycott courses--"if you hire him, we won't take his course." Nolan Jones said that is exactly the point--not to get teachers who offend black students. Mr. Van Til said that if we limit the student's role to "aiding in nominations and recruitment" we would get this same information into the system and thus serve the same purpose. We clearly would have failed in making an appointment if no students took the course.

Mr. Wright continued with his objections. The report implies that candidates be interviewed by black students. While this might be appropriate in many cases, it is something that must be left up to the individual departments and cannot be forced upon them. Also, such an interview implies that the candidate have the right "point of view". Doesn't this conflict with the AAUP statements on civil liberties that it is the right of the professor to say what he wants? If candidates are going to be interviewed by students, departmental majors is a much more appropriate group. Marilyn Allman said that the appropriate group

would be the Black Studies students, who would be taking the course. Mr. Legesse said that at Harvard a candidate in the Department of Social Relations gave a lecture to students, the students voted on the candidate, and the administration thus got student opinion (the vote was kept secret, so we do not know how the administration used the vote). Mr. Pierson suggested that the end of paragraph 5 read: " Each department should give an opportunity to the candidate to meet with interested students or their representatives if circumstances permit."

Mr. Wright asked which students would be notified in such a case? Majors and others that might be interested. Mr. Wright objected: isn't this overturning entirely the traditional manner of making appointments? Mr. Van Til said that it would be a good idea to get student opinion. Suppose, however, students opposed a candidate because he was supposed to be an "Uncle Tom". Isn't that making a political judgement that infringes on academic freedom? Student veto would be very dangerous; what we are talking about is "advising". Mr. Wright objected again. Student opinion cannot be very significant. Students would see the candidate for only half an hour and would be given only his public record. The faculty has other information available, such as graduate school record and letters of recommendation, that must be kept private. Marilyn Allman said that the students would not be interested in that anyway, what they would want to know is his relation to the subject matter. Mr. Wright said that he expected 80% faculty opposition to interviews between candidates and students. Mr. Van Til thought that in a modified form it would be acceptable to the faculty. Mr. Wright said that "consulting" about personnel is very different from "consulting" about issues.

We will meet again next Tuesday, November 5, 12:15, in Sharples Dining Hall.

Appended to minutes: "Report by Clinton Etheridge."

Corrections to the minutes of the Black Curriculum Committee, Tuesday, October 22, 1968.

1. The minutes are dated incorrectly as "October 15" (the date of the previous meeting). The date should read "October 22, 1968" on the minutes that read, beginning on line 7 of page 1, "Informal preliminary discussion: Can we recommend to the Political Science department that they consider Mr. Lester Lacey of Howard University...."

2. Page 3, three lines from the bottom. Written in above "Marilyn Holifield suggested that" should read "Marilyn Allman suggested that".