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Minutes of the meeting of the Black Studies Curriculum Committee.
Wednesday, November 20, 1968, 6:00-7:30 p.m., Sharples Dining Hall.

Members present: Mr. Pierson, Mr. Wright, Mr. Legesse, Mr. Shackford,
Don Mizell, Al Dietrich, Marilyn Allman, Marilyn Holifield.

Changes in Mr. Pierson's "Report of the Black Studies Curriculum Committee"
(appended to minutes of November 13, 1968) were discussed at this meeting.

Don Mizell said that the compromise proposal was unacceptable to the black students because it left out essential things. It would be acceptable, however, with the following changes:

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Page 4, the/paragraph under Staff Recruitment, second and third sentences should be changed to read: "Since both our students and faculty are predominantly white, the committee believes that black teachers with black perspective should be given top priority on the staffing of personnel for the Black Studies Program."

Page 5, the last two paragraphs should be changed to read:

"Recommendation III. Recognizing the acute interests both the black students as represented by their organization, the Swarthmore Afro-American Student Society, and majors have in the successful development of this program, the committee recommends that they have an active participating voice in both the recruitment and evaluation of potential personnel. In order to correct the imbalance in its total curricular offerings, Swarthmore should emphasize the black perspective in its Black Studies offerings by making a special effort to recruit black teachers who will also meet the colleges high academic standards. Part-time appointments and sharing arrangements will have to be considered because of the severe scarcity of qualified personnel."

Don emphasized that the students are not asking for veto power--that would never be passed by the faculty. They are only asking to be given the opportunity to say what they think of candidates. The purpose of this is to avoid problems (eg. hiring someone who would be offensive to the black students here). It is therefore in the interest of the students, of the faculty, and of the college, that the students be given the opportunity to express their attitudes before the teachers are hired.

Mr. Pierson suggested that the revised version of Recommendation III be made shorter and sharper, getting rid of the editorial writing. It should begin with the sentence, "In order to correct the imbalance....", to be followed by a new sentence: "In making these appointments the members of SASS and majors will have an active participating voice." followed by the last sentence as it now reads: "Part-time appointments...."

Mr. Legesse said that the recommendation was phrased in a way that would generate a negative reaction among the faculty--something like "might have" would be better. The aim of the proposal is to get the program set up, not to meet all the requirements for the ideal program. If the role of the students were limited to "nominating" candidates, this would allow just as effective influence, without interfering with traditional faculty prerogatives.

Mr. Wright asked, is Recommendation III meant to be binding to the faculty or is it optional to departments? Don said it was meant to be binding. Mr. Wright said this might make personnel even more scarce--if students and faculty could not agree on candidates. Marilyn Allman said that what the black students want is a fine Black Studies Program, not some half-hearted or shoddy program, and if it will take longer to agree on candidates then they would rather wait until a really fine person is found than try to make do with someone who is no good.

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Marilyn Holifield reiterated the point made by Don Mizell earlier. Recommendation III should not be taken so negatively. We are not trying to issue a directive to the college, but rather trying to assist the college. When all white groups decide on issues that affect black people, they often make mistakes due to a lack of awareness and special sensitivities. These mistakes can be avoided if students are given the opportunity to express their ideas about the candidates.

Al Dietrich said that black students won't take the course if they don't like the teacher, so it will work out the same way anyway. It would therefore facilitate the situation by having it done beforehand.

Mr. Pierson said that in the area of hiring there are no iron-bound rules made by the college. There is much personal variation, and each department proceeds on its own criteria. Would this continue? Other kinds of variations arise. For example, in the case of Professor Alexis from Rochester, he is so well known and established that it would have been beneath his dignity to come here and talk to faculty, let alone to students. Suppose we know we have only one week in which to get a candidate, whose reputation makes it clear (to the department) that he would be a desirable member of the faculty. Suppose there is not time for him to visit the campus, even if he would. How would we handle such a case?

Don Mizell said that the students could be given some information about the candidate (eg. publications)--anything as long as they are able to have an "active participating voice".

Mr. Wright objected that this would be a precedent with very broad consequences. If we do this, then there is no legitimate reason to say that interested student groups should not influence or have an "active participating voice" making other appointments. If we offer Recommendation III as a hortatory suggestion to departments, Mr. Wright would go along with it. If we mean it as a requirement, he cannot accept it.

Mr. Legesse said that Recommendation III would not change the relationship of department heads to their departments. Marilyn Holifield said that it would not limit the chairman's power. Mr. Shackford said that whether Recommendation III were accepted or rejected would not affect the process of the program--many departments would ask for student opinion on candidates for Black Studies positions, and presumably many candidates would ask to meet with students. Marilyn Allman said the black students would like to present Recommendation III to the faculty as a requirement so that they could see whether the faculty would accept or reject it.

Mr. Pierson rephrased his revision of Don Mizell's version of Recommendation III. The sentence "In making these appointments the members of SASS and majors will have an active participating voice" would be changed to read: "To this end SASS, majors, and other interested students should have an active participating voice in the recruitment and evaluation of potential personnel."

Mr. Wright said that it is important that we be rigorous and understand each other exactly in this committee. He said he would vote "yes" on Recommendation III, if "normally" or "where appropriate" or some such phrase were inserted. Mr. Pierson said that he hopes that department chairmen will recognize this as a special situation and that they will adopt a new approach for the new program.