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## Faculty Senate Minutes - November 13, 1991

Faculty Senators

*University of South Alabama*

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## UNCORRECTED MINUTES

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA FACULTY SENATE

NOVEMBER 13, 1991

The meeting was opened with the following remarks by Chairman Larry Holmes:

The University community is considering how best to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. The student Government supports a university holiday as does the Black Student Union. A committee appointed by President Whiddon has recently made its recommendations, which you now have before you (attached). It is a sign of the Faculty Senate's heightened visibility on this campus that this University community, including the President's office and Senior Vice President's office, is interested in learning of the position or positions the Faculty Senate might take on this matter. Involvement of administration, faculty, and student body bears witness that the issue at hand is not one of color or of any one constituency.

It is certainly true that a wide spectrum of people disagree as to the relative merits of Martin Luther King and what he did. Yet it is no less equally true and evident that Dr. King contributed mightily to reshaping the social and institutional landscape that we call the United States of America. The University of South Alabama has been from its beginning part of this new landscape. President Whiddon, while addressing the Senate last month, recalled how this institution endured criticism and threats because of its commitment to integration.

I frankly do not have a sense of what the Senate might say, or whether it can even reach a consensus. But let it be said that whatever the outcome of our deliberations, the Senate exercised leadership by a serious discussion of a matter of gravity.

Caryl Lloyd, chair of a subcommittee of the Senate's University Policy and Handbook Committee charged with overseeing discussion and fact-finding on this issue for the Senate, read the recommendation of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration Committee, chaired by Dr. George E. Uhlig (attached). Dr. Lloyd noted how the educational institutions of Alabama and surrounding states observe the occasion and the Mobile County closings for 1991. She then called attention to a handout of options for the observation of the holiday (Martin Luther King, Jr. - Holiday Options, attached). She reported Dr. Connell's concerns regarding the costs of adding a holiday to the calendar and his desire to have meaningful activities on campus, not a *pro forma* celebration.

Dr. Lloyd introduced Michael Mitchell, President of the Black Student Union (BSU). Mr. Mitchell noted that at the present time students are forced to choose between attending classes, which may even mean missing an exam, and attending event-related programming. He asked: "Why should USA observe Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday?" He answered with these three points. First, observing this occasion would improve the University's reputation in the community. He feels that USA's reputation is not a positive one as evidenced by minority students from this area choosing to attend other universities. Second, choosing to observe Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday with a holiday would make the University of South Alabama the leader of the "Big Three" -- Auburn University, the University of Alabama and the University of South Alabama. If we adopt this holiday other universities in the state will follow. Third, it is simply the right thing to do. During the sit-in last month, Mr. Mitchell said that he came to the realization that Dr. King did his thing in the 60's, but the fight is not over. We are still fighting today. He closed his remarks by saying that if the situation is not resolved soon, it might become volatile. He urged that something be done, that it be done soon.

Dr. Lloyd asked Mr. Mitchell to clarify what the BSU wants. He stated that the BSU is willing to compromise, but that 11-2 class dismissal will not do and that dismissal of all day classes would be good.

Dr. Lloyd introduced the President of the Student Government Association (SGA), Jody Dunn. Mr. Dunn read SGA Resolution 2/25/91/1 (attached) and stated that SGA supports the recommendation of the committee chaired by Dr. Uhlig. He went on to say that this is not a black vs. white issue. Dr. King did a lot for our country.

Social issues are as much a part of the educational process as are classroom activities. He has been told that the Faculty Senate controls the university calendar and urged us to vote for a holiday. He reported on a meeting in which Dr. Whiddon stated that our university was the first to have an open door policy, to which Mr. Mitchell replied "Why not be first again?" The students who participated in the sit-in took part because they are committed to changing *their* university.

The floor was then opened for discussion, moderated by Dr. Lloyd.

Dr. Fishman: The administration exists in order to give faculty time to do academic things. He feels that we are being asked to do its job and are being patronized. Dr. King is an important figure in history, but why celebrate his birthday and not others?

Dr. Schehr: It is shameful that the BSU is required to say why Martin Luther King, Jr. is important. There is education that needs to be done, but it should not have to be done at such a level. He suggested that the BSU and SGA make practical suggestions like adding an academic day to the quarter in exchange for an academic holiday.

Dr. Silver: The War for Independence has been fought and won, the Civil War has been fought and won, but the war on racism is heating up.

Student Guest: Urged active observance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday with a holiday and stated that students are consumers and, therefore, have a right to say what they want the university to do.

Dr. Lloyd asked, "What do you want us to support?"

Mr. Dunn stated that the SGA recommends the resolutions of Dr. Uhlig's Committee, and added that every conflict on campus that involves both a black and a white person turns into a racial question. He also pointed out that the University has a 4th of July holiday to honor great historical figures and events like Lincoln and the Civil War, therefore, their individual birthdays do not need to be observed.

Dr. Lloyd asked if Mr. Mitchell agreed with Mr. Dunn in supporting the recommendations of Dr. Uhlig's Committee with the understanding that the BSU is working toward a complete closing.

Mr. Mitchell agreed.

Dr. Moore: Staff and faculty may want to participate, may ask for vacation time, and may have that vacation time denied.

Dr. Longenecker suggested making a holiday part of the educational process by adding a new class of event, a new way to celebrate, using this observance as a time to initiate dialog.

One person suggested giving up Mardi Gras for a Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration.

Mr. Dunn: We are trying to be practical. We can't eliminate Mardi Gras. It just will not happen. He stated again that they have been told by several people that the Senate has control of the university calendar.

Dr. Schehr: The Faculty Senate is an advisory body. Will students be willing to give up a day of spring break in exchange for an academic holiday for Dr. King's birthday?

Students present: Yes.

Dr. Bastian: We need to remember that it is not as easy as it sounds to separate the medical side of the University from the academic side. The labs and hospitals must be considered.

Student Guest: Alternative programming requires a lot of work. We do have events planned every year. We are not comfortable enough to call on you all to help.

Dr. Lloyd: Help could be handled through committees.

Student Guest: Don't let your individual small objections kill the spirit of what we are trying to do.

Dr. Bunnell: We need to concentrate on what we can do for this year and then we can think about how to celebrate as a long range issue.

Dr. Raburn: Education is the issue. He expressed concern that Mr. Mitchell used a tactic that Dr. King also used - - fear. No group should use fear to threaten another group.

Mr. Dunn: There is programming planned for all day. If we have classes, people will not come back out at night for programs. SGA supports the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. holiday with day class dismissal. He said that he does not believe that the BSU is threatening the Senate, but feels that we are sitting on a keg and need to do something positive, now.

Dr. Lloyd: Black parents do look at the calendar for schools they are considering for their children. The observance of Martin Luther King's birthday indicates the tone of the school.

Dr. Daigle: The objective is education. If we dismiss all classes, students will not come to campus for programs, they will leave or not come in at all.

Guest: You may not be aware of how high tension is on this campus. There are fights between blacks and whites. Tension will continue to mount until some positive things are done.

Dr. Lloyd closed the discussion and asked for a meeting next week (November 20, 1991 at 3:00) to vote on resolutions. She asked that caucus leaders get together with faculty in their college to discuss the question in order to come back next week with an understanding of what is wanted.

Dr. Holmes adjourned the meeting by saying that we are blessed to have such articulate, thoughtful and sensitive people address the Senate on this issue. He urged us to talk to our colleagues and come back next week ready to take a vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Geneva L. Bush, Secretary