

Senate Executive Summary
March 3, 2006
Notre Dame Room, LaFortune

I. OPENING BUSINESS

- A. Lizzi Shappell called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.
- B. Lizzi Shappell led the invocation.
- C. Suj Pandaya, Sarah Liu, Ali Wishon, Andrew Beatty, Liz Brown, Chris Garibaldi, Jason Zgrabik, Katie McHugh, Lisa Rauh and Christina Calfee were absent.
- D. Pat Knapp moved to approve the minutes; Mariana Minutes seconded. *The minutes from the March 1, 2006 meeting of the Student Senate were approved at 4:07 p.m.*

II. PODIUM

A. Father John Jenkins, University of Notre Dame President

- i. Father Jenkins thanked us for inviting him here. He said that student government is a work of service, and he appreciates our effort. He said that he was impressed by the level of discussion among the students. One of the great challenges of this discussion is that it touches on issues which have a great deal of energy and strong views and they go along divides and culture wars. The challenge is that when you speak on these issues, there can be a tendency to simplify the positions, both yours and your opponents. This can make discussion difficult when the nuances are gone. It is not as simple as Catholic character or not? Censorship or not? He wants to focus the discussion on the pressing issues. Many views are expressed by this community. He acknowledges that some issues will be challenging, others will contradict the University's views, and that's fine. But he is trying to decide how you get balance? You want a balanced set of views and you want to challenge them creatively. Decisions have to be made and how do you do that? At a Catholic university, you must include a wide range of views to keep with the intellectual tradition. He then asked for our input.
- ii. Lisa Rauh's statement read by Lizzi Shappell. Her dorm supports unlimited academic freedom. They find it contradictory to limit academic freedom.
- iii. Katie McHugh's statement was read by Lizzi Shappell: "Fr. Jenkins, thank you for coming to Senate today. I am sorry I cannot be with everyone, but I had committed to attend a conference before this meeting was scheduled. Right now, I feel you and I have heard nearly every reasoned argument to the academic freedom and Catholic Character debate. Today I am looking for a solution. While trying to put myself in your shoes, I have tried to decide what actions you will be taking in the future.

"During your address you expressed concern with the Vagina Monologues being performed every year. Right now the compromise you might be looking for is to limit the play to every other or every

three or four years. While I cannot speak for every girl, not once in my life had I felt inferior because I was a woman... until I came to Notre Dame. Many, many things contribute to the male-dominated atmosphere here and I know I don't need to go into detail. Single-sex dorms and the Notre Dame atmosphere promote an objectification of both genders, especially women. How can we fix this problem? While few would disagree that the Vagina Monologues did successfully start discussion on violence against women, I think you must believe there has got to be another and a better way. Maybe there is, but for now the Vagina Monologues are what all too many women on this campus have. By only showing them once every two, three or four years, the controversy will surely die down as you hope. But will the discussion of violence against women follow? I am petrified of the repercussions this type of censorship will cause.

"A recent CNN survey showed that 66% of college students will be sexually harassed or assaulted by the time they graduate. With the distorted idea of gender relations we have on our campus, I would no doubt expect these numbers to be even higher. Even if the art and reality known as the Vagina Monologues may be considered offensive and non-Catholic, we must take advantage of the opportunity it offers to this campus now. I am frightened every time I think we may be letting a great opportunity go, with the hopes that something new will eventually come along and take its place. We have no time to let this disease on our campus grow. My argument is beyond the offensiveness of the Vagina Monologues because we all can admit men's sexuality is much more accepted in today's society than women's. I find it hard to attend this school knowing I can never sit in your position. Never can I be the president of the university that I will graduate from. Because of no other reason than the way I was born. Never should I have to feel ashamed of the way I was born and never should I have to fight so hard to protect what is so often degraded at this university. Whether the reason you are taking this production away from the many women this play has inspired is legitimate or not, I and many others feel yet again restrained, muted, and defined by a man's decision at this university.

"The solution I am offering to you has been one which I have asked many men and women about, and not one person has told me they do not agree. The University of Dayton has put clear disclaimers on tickets for events which may be against Catholic thought which state the university clearly does not endorse the event. After reading the open speaker policy in duLac which allows students to invite ANY speaker to campus and clearly states endorsement does not mean sponsorship, I feel this is the most fair and balanced approach.

"I am hopeful you are looking beyond the male dominated Cardinal Newman Society, alumni and others who are trying to make decisions on behalf of the students. Notre Dame Students deserve a chance to be the strongest and most intelligent Catholics in the world. By

not reaching out on issues involving sexuality every year, we are losing the priceless discussions we have had for the last two months. It is important to also remember the Notre Dame Student body is fluid; 2,500 new students and transfers begin their journey every year. Beginning the discussion early in their careers here may be the only way to reach out to them before they fall prey to the hook up culture and belief objectifying people based on their sexuality is acceptable. Lastly I would like to tell you I believe this academic controversy to be indivisible from the social aspects of campus. While the Keenan Revue and Dillon Pep Rally go on every year with entirely new skits, ultimately they mock, degrade and publicly humiliate many different groups of people. Clearly these performances are not in line with Catholic values, but have the ability to unite the student body. The Monologues serve the same purpose by fostering a community of support for women who feel objectified by societal norms. To me the Vagina Monologues send a message to women to be proud of who they are and to be more open to discussion. Isn't this what we want in a university? One of the last scenes of the Vagina Monologues brought a new realization to me this year. The scene, in which Eve Ensler's daughter has a child, shows the beauty of birth. The actress playing Eve says that all the trauma and joy you may go through in life that may be related to one's sexuality, shapes who you are. All of our experiences shape who we are. The point is, every reference to a vagina in the entire play really represented the hearts of these women; their feelings, their frustration, their joy... themselves. We cannot take this play away even in the least limited sense by taking away its stage, its fundraising, or its ability to go on every year. We must give women on this campus the feeling that they have a voice, and frankly once a year isn't enough."

- iv. Carol Hendrickson thanked Fr. Jenkins for bringing this issue to the attention of us and to the attention of colleges across the nation. She has gone door to door, received emails, and attended a dorm forum on academic freedom. After having read the Observer poll that students were split on this issue, she was skeptical, but having gone around and talking to people, found that this was true. Most people were supportive of the Vagina Monologues, but they were worried that the level of censorship would continue to grow. She thinks that as Catholics we need to be exposed to all things. We need to show employers that we are equipped to deal with diverse opinions. There is no definitive rule on censorship like VM. Other students respect Fr. Jenkins' right to make a decision. There is a consensus and a middle ground. The school needs to do more for violence against women, through fundraising, and a rape crisis line. Second, a statement that the University doesn't endorse this, would be enough to prevent the confusion of endorsement. We should not let college rankings; employers, etc decide what we do. She does see value in VM and QFF to continue on this campus. She didn't think that the content of the VM was that shocking and didn't think that

the play focuses enough on sexual violence. She thought it encouraged the sexual objectification of women. The play did not associate sexual pleasure with love. VM does not portray the correct message. The Catholic Church emphasizes both love and physical enjoyment of sex. She finds value in the play because it causes you to ask questions and realize stereotypes. Debate helps people ascertain their own beliefs. Fr. Jenkins said that his problem with the VM is the year after year performance. He asked how students feel about that. He can give an example: suppose that we had George W. Bush come to speak every year, but no prominent democrats. He thinks that people would rightly challenge that. He wants to emphasize balance. It would help to think along those lines. The occasional performance of VM would be fine. The year after year thing was the problem.

- v. Brian Klein asked what sort of events could take the place of VM. Fr. Jenkins said that there is a good initiative to compose our own reflections on the issue. This would serve us even better because it would be campus specific. He thinks that there have been imaginative thoughts
- vi. Matt Walsh said that he talked with Ali Wishon about this. It is his opinion that there exists a male dominated culture on campus. The Dillon Pep Rally and Keenan Revue both are pretty chauvinistic. He isn't saying that these events don't belong on campus, but most controversial issues have to deal with gender or sexuality. A lot of people feel that there is a void and voices of females are underrepresented and out-shouted. VM isn't perfect, but it sparks debate on a huge issue. As a Catholic University, how can we address the issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation at ND and at the same time while not compromising their Catholic character? Father Jenkins said that if students think these issues are important, they are. We need to address them and do so creatively. He wants to work together to address them. Repetition of a play could narrow the scope of the discussion. We need something that we can all talk about, not something as divisive. He thinks that students have to be a large part of the solution, and is 100% behind those issues.
- vii. Erin Hankins said that each time you see something you pick up something new. The VM is the same way. In addition, each actor doing a monologue interprets it in different ways. Therefore, each year the play is different and people pick up different emotions, so it's priceless.
- viii. Rob Lindley thanked Fr. Jenkins for coming here and opening up the discussion. The issue that was most brought up in Keough was that the issue is getting blurred. It is much more than VM and QFF, and needs to reflect academic freedom on campus. The discussion is beneficial for everyone. This definitely should not be restricted to the two events. The fundraising as an issue with the VM, because it is no longer being solicited. The money after was donated to pro-life non-profits. Residents saw this restriction as a way to hurt these organizations. The

discussion gets polarized. VM strive for a noble goal, but goes astray as it objectifies women. If there is a better way, he is strongly for it. It was good to see the play and the forum after explaining the issue from a variety of views. ND should never have to sacrifice its academic freedom for its catholic character and vice versa.

- ix. Christina Lee said that one of the biggest concerns was about how to define academic freedom and how it falls within the Catholic character. The discussion has been turned away from academic freedom and to VM. Fr. Jenkins said that it is a complex issue. The freedom of any faculty to research and write and to speak on other issues that is where the concept originated. And that also applies to students. A particular issue he is talking about is not any individual, but about the sponsorship of a University or the dorm. The departments get a lot of requests to sponsor things and he is looking at the criteria for those requests.
- x. Brenna Doyle said she had some questions about the issue of sponsorship and endorsement. What if the event was sponsored by a dorm and not a department? Fr. Jenkins said that he has similar concerns about diversity of views. Brenna said that some people were concerned about the future and a distinguished set of guidelines for productions. Fr. Jenkins said that he is not looking at guidelines, but more for balance. He wants to start discussion and presentations on controversial issues. The end is fostering these discussions, but how do we do that? There are some kinds of presentations that are offensive just to be offensive and have no redeeming value. Some jokes, some speech may offend a minority group or certain people and there is an argument to say that that shouldn't be preformed or printed in the Observer.
- xi. Jacques Nguyen: "As a representative of Knott Hall and as a constituent of intellectual and opinionated individuals, I have become aware of the overwhelming sense of distaste bred from the student debate over academic freedom. Neither apathetic nor zealous, the majority of my residence hall views that this ongoing debate is an inappropriate portrayal of the student opinion. To my fellow senators and committee chairs, as student representatives, we must be aware that there is a difference between arguing for academic freedom and the support of conflating political views. This line seems to have become invisible to many. To put it plain and simple, we do not feel at all threatened by what you, Father Jenkins, have clearly established as the administration's stance on the issue. As an academic institution that is rooted in the teachings of the Catholic faith, it seems to me most essential that the decisions of the administration reflect those values upheld by the religion. Therefore, we understand the university's desire to compromise as well as to inform. To hear all views. That way, the school may evolve as the world evolves. As long as views are intelligently expressed, they may be presented. Therefore, the idea of placing events within the confines of an academic setting is extremely plausible. No one here is in favor of violence against women. No one

here is in favor of discrimination. We understand the concern of the student body, though, we do not agree with the expression of disfavor from certain groups within the student body. And as representative of my dorm, I would like to express my personal support of the decisions made by this administration, those that will obviously stretch beyond those concerning the Vagina Monologues or the Gay and Lesbian Film Conference. However, please just beware of this fact: these choices, possessing certain subtle undertones, will definitely be commented upon by passionate and opinionated students all over campus, for years to come.”

- xii. Nick Guzman said that one thing about the VM every year, is that it is different each year. He would create a balance with more and not less. If you hold VM every year but also have conferences on theology of the body each year as well it would be better. This way, new classes of people have the opportunity to see it. Fr. Jenkins said that it does take some energy and time to put on the production. It does limit the options if you go down one road. Nick said that a four year span isn't a good time to see them more than once. If there are groups interested in presenting a different perspective, he doesn't think that having more of that is a bad idea.
- xiii. Matt Walsh pointed out that there are other venues that present these views. Like the Edith Stein Conference or the Primrose Path.
- xiv. Ben Gunty said that if we are seeing the 50-50 split on student opinion, he sees support and effort for both sides. Maybe some resources are limited, but there are enough views on each side, and having a repetition of these events would help all students see these events again. If we are juxtaposing the two events with each other, this would allow students approach these issues at varying times. The intelligent response to this issue has been comprehensive and this is evident of our ability as a student body to reason through opposition. We can draw on our own intellectual Catholic history the fruits of reason in addressing opposition. ND has unique opportunity to be a place to address these issues to go to be leaders of the world. Our opportunity is going to be different if we can't reason through the opposition in the real world.
- xv. Rhea Boyd expressed some concerned that when you bring up this topic, the only issues that come up are sexuality and gender. You encourage creativity, but if you want our students to be open and honest, how can you limit the way in which they can do that. Before you limit that, you need to look into what that means for others. If it has some value for some people, then it needs to be supported by the University, even if it doesn't go along with Catholic teaching. Purpose isn't to have one time thing, but rather a campus environment that does support women. When you talk about limiting academic freedom, it could scare faculty from coming here. As a campus of young leaders we need to make sure that we are reconciling our faith in the face of these issues. Catholic character is not what we do, but how we do it. It is our responsibility

and privilege to ask tough questions, and hear the opinions of others not of our experience.

xvi. Brian Klein read a speech: "I don't know about the rest of you, but I did not come to this university to be comfortable.

I came here because I wanted to be challenged every day. I wanted to be forced to consider alternative perspectives and to engage contentious ideas both inside and outside the classroom.

It's not an overstatement to say that the future of our University is at stake in this discussion. Depending on how Father Jenkins' administration decides to interpret the relationship between Catholicism and academic freedom, I see two very different Notre Dames down the road.

The first is an elite university that respects the classroom as a safe forum for discussion of controversial material but restricts the expression of contentious perspectives from its public space.

It is a place where we can argue but not necessarily perform, read but not exhibit, where we might privately consider, but collectively condemn.

The second alternative, as I see it, is more than an institution of learning. It is an open and engaged community, one where we are free to stage events—yes, with departmental sponsorship—that espouse controversial points of view, that challenge the beliefs we hold most sacred, that are meant to provoke disagreement, dissention, and ultimately a greater discernment of truth.

What kind of campus culture do we want to create?

Is Notre Dame Catholicism to be dictated dogma? Or will it continue to represent the search for living truth?

I recently came across some of the writings of Frank O'Malley. He attended and taught at Notre Dame, living on campus from 1928 until his death in 1974. A devout Catholic and brilliant intellectual, O'Malley is widely credited as the greatest humanities professor Notre Dame has ever known. While I don't pretend to know how he would side in this debate, I believe two passages from his work are particularly relevant to our current discussion.

The first deals with a Christian's role in society.

"The Christian man," he writes, "knows that his achievement of intellectual and moral virtue ought not to set him at severe odds with the society in which he finds himself...The necessity for the Christian man...is to comprehend the world in all its weaknesses and terrors no less than in its glories and wonders. Because of the human deficiencies inevitable in the Church itself on earth, the deficiencies which are Christ's very Cross, he knows that he cannot expect perfection from ordinary humanity, that he cannot isolate himself from men and the real world, that he must live in the face of all sorts of exigencies and evils. The Christian knows that he must live as a Christian in the more or less un-Christian world."

The second focuses on the responsibility of a Catholic university.

He begins, "There is no licit reason why Catholic philomaths professing... "to preserve in the present the actuality of the eternal", should not master the stuff and system of the most adequate "profane" learning, before they set themselves up as experts in the business of spiritualizing knowledge.

"The moral virtues are formed by a lifelong process, to which a university education contributes, but which cannot be its primary purpose to supply. A university education must chiefly be directed to inculcating the intellectual virtues and these are the product of rigorous intellectual effort."

There are no easy answers in this debate. But nonetheless I urge you to consider, and ultimately to protect the right to be made uncomfortable. Fr. Jenkins---ND should have a diversity of opinions and we should be made uncomfortable. We have more in common than your speech might suggest.

- xvii. Pat Knapp said that from the perspective of the theater, VM is not meant to be interpreted on an objective basis. It is a referendum on a real tangible aspect of the world we live in. Works of art weren't meant to be preformed in the classroom alone. To deny the performance of the VM, would deny truth that this is a very real issue in our society. Violence against women is something we should strive to end as Catholics. FTT examined the Laramie Project, which had to deal with Matthew Shepard. This had many scenes against catholic values. What is the criterion for judging whether art's performance is too much against Catholic character? Fr. Jenkins said that it is not so much that VM contradicts Catholic teaching, but shows the world differently than it is. The repetitive performance of the play gives it a prominence that most other things on campus don't have. The Laramie project was different because that is a condemnation of the murder and hate of that situation. Does the whole play elevate us and make us think about moral issues? Pat raised the concern about the fundraising stemming from VM. Fr. Jenkins said that the student initiatives have been significant, and there will be events and there will be more work on the future. Thinks we have a moral imperative to do so.
- xviii. Steve Tortorello asked what other types of events did Fr. Jenkins see as possible restriction or issue with endorsement. Fr. Jenkins said that he wouldn't want to say anything right now. There is nothing looming. He just wants us to be more reflective, he doesn't want to be in the business of banning things.
- xix. Brian Klein asked what he thought of the system of a department vote on sponsorship. Fr. Jenkins said that it is up to them.
- xx. Matt Walsh asked what is his personal opinion is on University sponsorship, and his position on official and unofficial group sponsorship. Fr. Jenkins said that his initial thought is that they should have the same broad considerations on both for dorms and departments.

Things with the distinction between groups could be cleared up in the future.

- xxi. Dave Baron thanked Fr. Jenkins for coming forward on this issue.
- xxii. Fr. Jenkins said that however this issue of academic freedom turns out, he does think that the issues of gender, sexuality, women issues are important on this campus. He said that he would like our help on how to address those issues. We understand the situation better than he does and we need to help him think about issues and how to address them.

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A. Mark Seiler said that Senators could get their safe spring break t-shirts from him.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

- A. Ben Gunty moved to adjourn; Brian Klein seconded. *The March 3, 2006 meeting of the Student Senate was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.* The next meeting will take place on March 8, 2006 in the Notre Dame Room of LaFortune.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alyce Baumgartner
Student Body Secretary

