

CPUC Resources Committee Annual Report: Academic Year 2016-2017

The Resources Committee is a committee of the Council of the Princeton University Community (CPUC). By charter of the CPUC, the Committee is comprised of three members of the faculty, one graduate student, and two undergraduate students, one member from another of the groups represented on the Council, and the Vice President for Finance and Treasurer. A member of the Princeton University Investment Committee (PRINCO) serves as a non-voting member.

For the 2016-2017 academic year, the Resources Committee was chaired by Professor Michael Littman. Other Committee members included Professors Bo Honoré and Blair Schoene; Colette Johnson, GS; Shannon Osaka, '17; Grace Obiofuma, '18; Janet Finnie, '84, University Health Services; Carolyn Ainslie, VP for Finance and Treasurer. Susan Ciniglio, PRINCO, participated as a non-voting member of the Committee. Mark Dingfield, Finance and Treasury, provided staff support for the Committee.

Summary

The Resources Committee had an active year of discussions and deliberations focused mainly on the issue of divestment from the private prison industry. To inform the question of whether private prisons contravene University values and to evaluate the proposal to divest, the Committee discussed and began to gather additional information about the role and business model of for-profit prisons in the context of the larger prison system, whether there are differences between private and public prisons, the relationship between the prison system and criminal justice policies, and the issue of prison oversight and regulation by accreditors, government, or other funders. The incomplete and sometimes contradictory nature of research and analysis across these topics necessitates a careful and deliberate assessment of these complex issues.

The Princeton Private Prison Divestment coalition provided important context for these deliberations and demonstrated sustained campus interest in the topic. Given the campus interest, the Committee will pursue this topic next academic year and will continue to follow the guidelines established by the Trustees with a specific focus on determining whether there is a central University value at stake and, if so, whether there is consensus on how the University should respond.

Meetings

The committee held two meetings during the fall, on November 11, 2016 and December 2, 2016. Representatives from the Princeton Private Prison Divestment coalition (PPPD) joined both meetings to discuss their proposal that Princeton divest from eleven companies associated with the private prison industry. This marked a continuation of discussions with the Committee that first began in March 2016. (These meetings, including member discussion with Columbia University to understand their divestment process, are documented in the [Resources Committee's 2015-16 annual report](#).)

At the December 2, 2016 meeting, the Committee reviewed and provided initial feedback on the proposal to PPPD representatives. The Committee also voiced support for the coalition's desire to organize a panel discussion about the issue early in the spring semester and encouraged the coalition to include knowledgeable academic perspectives on the panel. The panel was held on February 6, 2017, and included Christopher Petrella, a researcher at Bates College; Carl Takei, an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); and Judith Greene, director of Justice Strategies.

The Committee met again on February 10, 2017 to deliberate on the issue of private prison divestment and the proposal from PPPD. During this discussion, a consensus emerged within the Committee that the PPPD proposal, in its current form, did not meet the high bar for recommending dissociation. Committee members cited different reasons for reaching this conclusion; but the conclusion was shared by all.

On March 10, 2017, the Committee met with PPPD representatives to convey this position. Members of the Committee provided their individual perspectives, which included questions about whether the actions of the private prison industry contravened a core University value, and if so, could this be articulated within the context of other core University values. Committee members also suggested that the proposal could better support its argument through a more thorough engagement with the evidence and scholarship listed in the proposal.

Representatives from the PPPD requested that the Committee provide an update on its consideration of this issue at the March CPUC general meeting, which the Committee agreed to do. The PPPD also asked the Committee to unequivocally reject the PPPD's proposal. Although the Committee was willing to reject the proposal in its existing form, the Committee conveyed to PPPD representatives that it was still actively considering the issue of private prison divestment.

At the March 27, 2017 CPUC general meeting, Committee Chair Michael Littman provided an update on the Committee's consideration of the issue and stated the Committee's position that the proposal, in its current form, did not meet the bar for recommending dissociation. Professor Littman also emphasized that the Committee would continue to consider this issue. President Eisgruber noted that the University was not currently invested in any of the eleven companies listed in the PPPD proposal. Representatives from the PPPD staged a walk-out and teach-in immediately outside the CPUC meeting.

To help inform its ongoing deliberations, the Committee invited Naomi Murakawa, Associate Professor of African American Studies at Princeton and an expert in the field, to meet with the Committee on April 17, 2017. Professor Murakawa graciously provided the Committee with valuable historical and policy insights into the current state of the U.S. prison and criminal justice systems.

The Committee met for a final time this academic year on May 8, 2017, at which time it reaffirmed its intent to continue consideration of private prison divestment next academic year. While the Committee welcomes further campus input and constructive dialogue, consideration of this topic will continue even if no further input or proposals are received.

Looking Ahead

The PPPD's efforts have been instrumental in demonstrating sufficient sustained campus interest in the topic to warrant continued consideration by the Committee into the next academic year. This timeline is in keeping with the Trustee guidelines, which state that it "may be appropriate, for example, to require that an issue be raised several times over an extended period of time, say two academic years."

Members of the Committee identified several questions and topics that the Committee should further evaluate next year. These topics include continued deliberation of whether private prisons contravene core University values and, if so, in what ways? How might issues of public policy, such as criminal justice sentencing guidelines and enforcement, immigration, and prison regulation and oversight, affect the prison population and operations? Should we consider the effects of these policies relative to the question of divesting from private prisons?

Do the operations and outcomes of private and public prisons differ in meaningful ways and does that impact the divestment consideration? Would divestment apply to the entire private prison industry or just

to specific corporations? Could a private prison corporation meet certain standards that would deem it acceptable for investment? Is there additional research or context from other knowledgeable individuals or organizations that could inform the Committee's consideration of divestment from private prisons?

Assuming that a central university value is at stake, is it possible to reach consensus on how the University should respond?

The Committee will study these issues over the summer months and resume meeting early in the 2017-2018 academic year. In addition, the Committee will begin updating its website to ensure that the guidelines, proposals, and other background information are more accessible. The Committee also discussed how broader input on proposals or issues could be facilitated by the use of the website. The Committee also recommends providing an overview of the Resources Committee's charge, guidelines, and processes at the first CPUC meeting of each year to help inform and educate the community about its purpose and work.