

TRANSMITTAL AND ABSTRACT OF SENATE REPORT

Date Presented to the Senate:

Presenter: Willie L. Brown – Human Relations Committee

Subject of Report: Prayer at Commencement

Senate Document Number: 07-08-34

**Voting: (a) on resolutions or recommendations one by one, or
(b) in a single vote
(c) to endorse entire report**

A. Statement of Issue:

Discontinuance of Prayer at University Commencement Ceremony.

B. Recommendations:

In an effort to be more sensitive to believers and non-believers in attendance at the university's commencement ceremony, the committee recommends that the current practice of an invocation be discontinued in the campus wide ceremony.

C. Committee Work:

The issue of Prayer at Commencement was first raised in the 2005 session of the Human Relations Committee and was a carryover into the 2006 session as unfinished business. The Human Relations Committee worked on the issue over the course of the next two years and twice brought it before the Senate Executive Committee and once before the Senate (see attachments). The second time that this was discussed in the SEC, the committee recommendation was to have a moment of silence in addition to the invocation. This was thought to be a compromise that would allow non-believers to contemplate whatever it was they wanted to contemplate, without the mention of a deity. After much debate, the SEC returned the proposal to the committee.

In the last round of addressing this issue, the committee met with Diane Krejsa of the President's Office of Legal Affairs to get a legal viewpoint about the practice at the University. Much to the committee's chagrin, there is no clear stance from the Supreme Court in regards to higher education on this issue. Additionally the committee did a review of our peer institutions (Berkeley, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina and UCLA) and found that none of the peers have prayer at commencement.

In the past three years the University of Maryland has not performed a benediction. Only the invocation has been done since May of 2006. This has not been a policy but has become an acceptable practice. The committee discussed in depth as to what does the University, faculty, and students want in terms of Prayer at Commencement and should this become a policy for all institutions at the university? It was decided that the individual institutions would continue to make that decision on their own.

D. Alternatives:

Leave the university commencement as is with two minutes devoted to Invocations.

E. Risks:

This is a topic that is as old as time and there is no perfect solution. Therefore this proposal will not be met with the approval of everyone and someone will find offense. There are no other risks.

F: Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications