

**Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, January 24, 2005**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Ray Plaza, Pat Hyer, Marilyn Kershaw, Devi Gnyawali, Hayward Farrar, Susanna Rinehart, Cynthia Bonner, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, Fain Rutherford (for David Travis), Jon Wooge, Edwin Larroy Rodriquez LaChelle Waller, Maxine Lyons, Leon Geyer, Monika Gibson, Darleen Baker

**Absent:** Linda Woodard, Jeff Mann, Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Sam Cook, Lois Berg, Mary Madis, Valerie Hardcastle, Brandon Smith, Susan Anderson, Ruth Grene

**Guests:** Mary Grace Campos, Jennie Reilly, Ellen Plummer

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

**II. Chair Report**

Ray Plaza shared copies of the Black History Month calendar and thanked commission members for their assistance at the Diversity Summit on Friday. He also reported that there are two new members to the commission. Ruth Grene is taking Edd Sewell's place since he teaches a class Monday mornings and Susan Anderson is taking the place vacated by Helen Crawford. The memo from the CEO to the President requesting the university reconsider the Peace Garden Proposal was sent. Ray indicated that he thought the Rotary might want to come before the commission to present their case. A number of members suggested that would not be appropriate and that the issue needs to be dealt with by the administration. Finally, Ray reminded members that a subcommittee or task force will need to be formed this semester to deal with the selection process for new at-large members.

**III. Old Business**

**A. Recommendations on Dealing with the Lee Hall Name/Situation**

Ray distributed revised recommendations categorized as short, medium, and long term. He shared that orientation will no longer be using the video to address diversity issues. It was suggested that the commission invited Tom Brown and Rick Sparks to a meeting to discuss diversity concerns and how to best address them at orientation. Additionally, a discussion on faculty and staff orientation needs to occur. Ray recommended that one of the February meetings of the commission be devoted to orientation.

A concern was raised about the importance of not focusing solely on Lee Hall, since it is part of a larger history and is one of many possible examples. Similar concerns from previous meetings were raised again, including the need to not limit a display to Lee Hall. It was recommended that if a display is placed in Lee Hall that it also be available on-line to increase its visibility and access. Considerable discussion occurred around the portrait of Claudius Lee that was removed in 1997. It was suggested that the portrait not be put back up but that a display could include pictures.

Members were reminded that orientation should not be relied on too heavily since students already receive information overload and do not necessarily retain what is presented. In response, a recommendation was made to craft a one to three-year programmatic scheme that would help students understand Virginia Tech's historical exclusion of certain groups as a context for today's diversity issues. This could be a medium/long term goal. The seeds of this could be planted at orientation and then followed up with more significant programming throughout the academic year.

Edwin Larroy Rodriguez shared that part of the Cultural Centers' Strategic Plan includes working more closely with academics and other units across campus as well as creating a cultural competencies course. The proposal is for a 4000 level course that could be adapted for undergraduate and graduate students. Some concerns were raised about a class at that level for undergraduates.

Another recommendation was the development of a DVD and documentary video that outlines Virginia Tech's ongoing process to transform itself from an institution of exclusion to one of inclusion.

The question was raised whether this information had been shared with DROP Alliance and other students who presented their case before the commission. Ray responded that members should be sharing this information with their constituent groups and that when a determination is made and sent forward to the president, those students will be copied. Ben said that with the permission of the members, he would update the students on this discussion at a meeting with them later today.

A final edit to the recommendations was to explore, rather than establish, a diversity learning community. Members were also reminded that graduate students are another group that is not really addressed in these recommendations.

Ray will send a revised document with the hopes that next week this can be finalized and he can forward the commission recommendations to the President by February 1.

## **B. University Council Realignment**

There was considerable conversation on the proposed realignment of University Council. Hayward Farrar indicated that this does not send a good message and since the upper administration is still primarily white males, the seats elected by the Black Organizations Council and the Black Caucus should remain and if needed, more seats should be added for the other communities. Eliminating the existing seats reduces the clout and power of the Black community.

The question was raised as to why the proposal was made. Pat Hyer indicated that the language in the constitution of University Council needed to be changed and the committee felt that since diversity is more than black and white those seats be elected more broadly. The committee also felt that the Commission on Student Affairs and the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity are the vehicles to introduce policy to University Council and are both very diverse groups.

Marilyn Kershaw articulated the response of the Black Caucus. They do not want to lose their seat and are also concerned because historically African Americans have been discriminated against more than any other group. There was an additional concern over the removal of the Director of Equal Opportunity.

Ben Dixon proposed a compromise to increase University Council by two and give the Commission four seats to deal with on a two-year rotation. Ray asked that members think about the options so that a decision can be made next week. A final recommendation was to have either all the seats elected by the respective communities or the commission but not a mixture of the two.

## **IV. New Business**

### **A. VT Principles of Community**

Ray asked that members share some of the table conversations about the VT Principles of Diversity from the Diversity Summit. Some of the issues raised were:

- ❖ How to move from words to action

- ❖ How to measure it
- ❖ How will people be held accountable
- ❖ Concern over the use of the term “confront”
- ❖ Treat it like the Honor Code
- ❖ Change to “I” statements and have people sign it like a pledge
- ❖ Put it on the VT Directory
- ❖ Too long
- ❖ Include it on syllabi

**B. Tsunami Response**

Invitations to the Hokies United Silent Parade of Flags and Brief Ceremony were distributed. This event will remember and honor the victims of the tragic tsunami in Asia this Friday, January 28. The parade of flags will begin at noon at Squires and move to Burruss Auditorium for a brief ceremony.

**VI. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is Monday, January 31 at 10:00 a.m. in Conference Room C, Donaldson Brown. The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia P. Cohen, Secretary to the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity