

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, January 31, 2005

Minutes

Present: Ray Plaza, Pat Hyer, Marilyn Kershaw, Hayward Farrar, Susanna Rinehart, Cynthia Bonner, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Jean Brickey, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, David Travis, Jon Wooge, Edwin Larroy Rodriguez, LaChelle Waller, Monika Gibson, Mary Madis, Valerie Hardcastle, Linda Woodard, Susan Anderson, Craig Brians

Absent: Darleen Baker, Jeff Mann, Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Sam Cook, Brandon Smith, Devi Gnyawali, Maxine Lyons, Leon Geyer, Ruth Grene

Guests: Mary Grace Campos, Jennie Reilly, Ellen Plummer

I. Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented. Jennie Reilly introduced Craig Brians who will be taking Lois Berg's position on the commission.

II. Chair Report

Ray Plaza began by thanking those who helped with the flag ceremony on Friday. Na'im Akbar, the keynote speaker for Black History Month, will be speaking this Thursday, February 3. So far 96 people have filled out evaluations of the Diversity Summit. The evaluation will be extended for one more week and then the results will be summarized and shared. Dr. McNamee reported on the progress of the Charter University Initiative in a meeting this morning. A three-tier process is being developed so that all institutions could go through the steps to receive more autonomy. It appears that about 80% of the proposal is being adopted with institutions remaining state agencies. Staff will still be part of the VRS system and they are encouraging boards to work on six-year tuition cycles.

III. Old Business

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

Ray shared some of the changes in the revised document, including the addition of areas involved related to each action item. Additionally, after speaking with Student Programs, it was decided that it be important to share the history of all residence halls and how they received their names as well as the creation of a broad programming body. Student Programs also responded that New Residence Hall East would not be a good location for a learning community.

Cynthia Bonner talked about the importance of involving residents of Lee Hall and/or the Hall Council in some discussions. She has heard that there are some feelings of guilt/anxiety expressed by some of the residents. She suggested that could be added to action item #1 in the short term.

Ray then asked for any changes in the action items listed under short term. Pat Hyer recommended removing the VT Police from the areas involved for action item #4. While the police might be needed to assist with security of the display, it was felt they didn't need to be listed there. She also raised the question of having the commission listed under area involved for each item. It was determined that CEOD should be removed and be referenced as having the role of oversight of the action items in the cover document.

For the medium term, there was discussion around action #4 with the recommendation to change the language to say develop and disseminate a set of resources that could be used by faculty to discuss diversity issues at Virginia Tech. Additional conversation focused on items #1 and #2. The word

annually was added to both items to indicate these would not be one-time actions. Jean Brickey questioned whether education should be on how each building on campus was named and not just the residence halls. While many agreed on the merit of the idea, it was not viewed as a priority at this time. Ben Dixon reminded members of the need to make a strong connection to living on campus and living in community, reinforcing the education of the naming of the residence halls and not necessarily other buildings on campus.

Jennie Reilly asked about updating the Diversity Awareness Workshop to include the VT Principles of Community. Ben responded that updating the workshop will be part of an education and training initiative next year. A new position has been created and will work closely with the Office for Equal Opportunity in developing a comprehensive education and training program.

Kim Beisecker questioned what the response would be to students who refuse to live in Lee Hall. Ray indicated that Student Programs has a policy for dealing with cases like that, so there is no need to create anything new or different.

Finally, Marilyn Kershaw asked about the time frame for the honorary degree for Irving Peddrew. Ben responded that informal conversations have taken place since the initial recommendation in 1997 but having it part of these recommendations might move it forward in a more formal way. He also said it would likely take at least six months to go through the necessary process.

In the area of long term, considerable discussion focused on action item #1, the university mandated diversity course for all students. Valerie Hardcastle voiced concern over mandating courses. She indicated that faculty would not accept this and that it would be problematic for a number of reasons, including the fact that there are no other courses required of all students. In theory, many members support this item, but in practice, most feel it is not feasible. In response, Kim suggested an on-line module that could be required of all new students, similar to one being done for alcohol education. There was concern with the lack of conversation and discussion with an on-line course. Ben suggested that an on-line course/module could be combined with face-to-face opportunities for students to engage in conversations.

Valerie pointed out that a number of courses already exist that deal with issues of diversity and that a better approach might be to have colleges/departments demonstrate that there is a diversity component in each major/minor. Additionally, members spoke of the fact that employers want to see hard evidence that students have “learned” about diversity and that it needs to be embedded in all activities, not just in the classroom. In that regard, Monika suggested an exercise similar to the group that worked on internationalizing the campus. In response, Pat recommended the action item be changed to read, establish a task force, led by faculty, with a charge to develop and propose a variety of workable options to dramatically increase student multicultural competence through new or revised courses, certificate programs, or other methods that will fully integrate diversity issues in the curriculum.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the recommendations as revised. The motion carried. Individuals will be able to share this document with constituent groups once the president receives his copy. Members were reminded that this is not final, the president can modify or enhance the proposal.

B. University Council Realignment

Ray shared the four options to be considered:

Option #A: CEOD would get four seats: two for faculty/staff and two for students. CEOD would rotate these on a two-year cycle among the different constituent groups.

Option #B: CEOD would support the current University Council seats remaining with the Black Caucus and BOC using the appropriate language to ensure that they are in compliance with the legal standard.

In addition, CEOD would still get one seat for faculty/staff and one for students that CEOD could rotate on a yearly basis. *(This would increase UC membership by two seats)*

Option #C: CEOD recommends that all constituent groups be afforded seats on University Council.

Option #D: CEOD would assume the role over the former seats for the Black Caucus and BOC, and determine an election process based on a rotation of the different constituent groups.

Hayward Farrar voiced his concern over the importance of all constituent groups having seats on the council. He suggested it be better to have an unwieldy council that is inclusive to one that is efficient but exclusive. Considerable discussion ensued on both sides of the issue. Ben reminded members of the struggle when dealing with issues of equity and equal treatment. One of the benefits of the commission is the ability to represent constituencies to move issues and policies forward to the university. Individual seats on university council will not give those groups a sense of empowerment or lead to the same kinds of rich discussions that occur through the CEOD.

Hayward added that the presence of diverse people changes the dynamics and by adding these seats would change the chemistry of the council. Valerie commented that since some of the smaller groups might have difficulty filling seats since they are already spread thin, they could choose to join forces with other smaller groups and have one seat representing multiple communities.

Pat reminded members of the concern with changing the numbers of faculty, staff, students, and administrators on the council. The most frequent business of the council is academic issues with very few controversial issues. With that in mind, there is sensitivity to having greater numbers of faculty members given that the academic and faculty employment matters make up the majority of the business. Rarely do members vote along racial/ethnic lines.

Ray suggested an informal poll to narrow the options down to two before a formal vote. Options B and C were supported by the majority of members. A motion was made and seconded to recommend Option C. The motion failed. A second motion was made and seconded to recommend Option B. The motion passed.

The second issue in the University Council realignment is the elimination of the EO director position. The history behind the position is that it was added in the 1990s to give the council more diversity but that with the vice president for multicultural affairs, chair of the CEOD, and other seats, there is no longer the need for that representation. A question was raised about the message it sends to remove that position. Many argued that the function of the office and what it represents are significant enough to have a seat. Additionally, given the issues of the council around faculty hiring, many felt the need to have the director there. Finally, Linda added that it gives prominence to the position and a visible role that is really needed at this time. A motion was made and seconded to retain the director of equal opportunity position on University Council. The motion passed. Ray will forward these responses to Sam Easterling. The task force will then submit a proposal to the president and in order to change the constitution, it will need to be passed by both the faculty and staff senates.

C. VT Principles of Community

Pat shared the most revised version of the principles. Given the considerable number of people who were uncomfortable with the word “confront” it was removed. Additionally, the decision was made to keep the EO statement which matches our non-discrimination statement to have the board endorse it. Discussion then revolved around the third paragraph and how to change some of the wording. LaChelle informed members that the GSA had considerable discussion at their meeting last week and have a subgroup meeting this week to further discuss the document. She will share with them the revised version. A final recommendation by Valerie was to move the sixth paragraph up to the first paragraph and then have the principles follow. There was general consensus to adopt those changes and have Pat distribute a revised version. The plan remains to have the principles presented to the BOV in March.

VI. Next Meeting

Linda shared that the search for the Director of Equal Opportunity has been reopened. The next meeting is Monday, February 14 at 10:00 a.m. in Conference Room C, Donaldson Brown. Dr. Norrine Bailey Spencer will share student enrollment data at that meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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