

**Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity**  
**Monday, October 11, 2004**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, Darleen Baker, Helen Crawford, Jeff Mann, Linda Woodard, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Mary Madis, LaChelle Waller, Marilyn Kershaw, Devi Gnyawali, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, Cynthia Bonner, Fain Rutherford (for David Travis), Jon Wooge, Maxine Lyons, Brandon Smith, Monika Gibson

**Absent:** Valerie Hardcastle, Edwin Larroy Rodriguez, Susanna Rinehart, Leon Geyer, Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Lois Berg, Hayward Farrar, Sam Cook

**Guests:** Ellen Plummer, Jennie Reilly

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

**II. Chair Report**

Ray welcomed two new members: Monika Gibson, representing the Commission on Student Affairs, and Marilyn Kershaw representing the Black Caucus. Fain Rutherford was also present in place of David Travis. Ray then distributed a handout with descriptions of the task forces and a sign-up sheet for them. He moved on to ask commission members if they felt that the CEOD should release a statement given the incident on the NAACP door and subsequent graffiti in McBryde Hall. He shared a statement that he had drafted and asked for comments on it. He also passed around the SGA resolution in response to these incidents. Michael Goode shared the student perspective that press releases are not enough. The students do not feel that the university is dedicated to diversity. They feel like it is up to them to take action since the university has not stepped up to the plate.

Cynthia Bonner shared how the Division of Student Affairs is responding to these incidents. There are two areas of focus: security and student life/campus climate. In the area of security, there has been a meeting with student organizations that have offices in Squires concerning cameras and the implications of increased security and cameras. Additionally, the policy on handling vandalism in the building has been changed so that it is covered up but not touched until the police have an opportunity to investigate. With regards to campus climate, the Office of Student Life is investigating the possibility of bringing in a facilitator who has experience in addressing hate crimes on campus. They are also considering some hate crime campaigns. Unfortunately, most of them focus more on t-shirts and buttons. Finally, there will be a campus climate check-up and the Face-to-Face program on November 13 will focus on hate crimes.

It was suggested that others outside of the Division of Student Affairs could also be involved in some of these efforts, specifically, the Women's Center. It was also mentioned that if the incident on the door of the NAACP office had been against LGBTQA it would not be viewed as a hate crime. Fain Rutherford responded that the university has administrative policies that extend more protection than Virginia statute.

After some revisions to the draft statement, a motion was made and seconded to adopt the statement as altered. The motion carried. A number of members suggested that the statement along with the actions being taken in the Division of Student Affairs be publicized widely so that members of the university community can see that actions are being taken in response to the incidents. Suggestions included a CT article, a link from the VT homepage, and an article in the next issue of the Spectrum.

### **III. Old Business**

#### **A. Recommendations from the Task Force on the International Strategic Plan**

Kim Beisecker introduced the memorandum to Dr. McNamee from the Commission. Ben Dixon suggested adding and global diversity to the last sentence in the second paragraph. A motion was made and seconded to approve the memorandum as amended send it forward to the Provost and S.K. DeDatta. The motion carried.

#### **B. Diversity Summit**

Ray indicated that the summit is one of the task forces and although the commission as a whole will be involved, the task force will provide the leadership for the program. One of the first issues that will need to be addressed is the date and time for the summit so that a location can be secured. Another important item is the need to get the word out sooner. He would like to have information set so that by November 1 or 15 the date is widely circulated to faculty, staff, and students.

#### **C. BOV Short Position Paper on Diversity**

Ben Dixon asked that responses to the matrix sent out last week be submitted to him at the end of the meeting or tomorrow so that he can summarize this input for the BOV members on the Academic Affairs Committee. A question was raised regarding institutional transformation and restructuring. Ben responded that this is not a call for the reorganization of the university, although in the case of student affairs, a review is about to begin and could result in restructuring. Institutional transformation is not only about attitudes but how we get things done at the university. Susan Willis-Walton suggested that information they gather from VT alumni which is mandated by SCHEV could cut across all four areas and might be appropriate to include in an appendix.

#### **D. Charter University Initiative**

Ray informed the commission that Minnis Ridenour is not available to attend the meeting on November 15, but Larry Hincker, Associate Vice President for University Relations, will be present to answer questions about the Charter University Initiative. He then opened the floor for a brainstorming discussion on the potential impact of the initiative on equity and diversity. One of the major impacts would be the university's ability to increase tuition. There is a concern that increased tuition could affect access. An important question for students is given increased tuition, will the university also increase financial aid and in what kind of form will it be? Some students are concerned that funding would be in the form of loans which will just increase student debt.

Another impact would be increased power in the Board of Visitors. The Student Government Association is concerned about the checks and balances if the BOV has more power. They plan to request that the student representative to the BOV be picked solely by students and that the student have voting power.

Staff concerns revolve mostly around the issue of benefits being protected. Linda Woodard shared that the charter legislation does provide protection of benefits, but that does still seem to be the greatest area of concern for staff. Additionally, it moves human resource policy to the BOV from the state, so staff would fall under the BOV just like faculty currently do. The locus of control moves from the state to the BOV.

A member asked how this could impact the Office for Equal Opportunity. Fain Rutherford responded that their office is obligated to follow federal law, so there shouldn't be any changes to the work that they do. Ellen Plummer shared that part of the discomfort individuals have with the initiative is concern about what is proposed versus what is actually passed and how the legislation might change through the process.

Linda explained that some questions might be answered by a spectrum-like publication being sent this week to all employees to help increase awareness and understanding of the initiative. Edd Sewell shared that most faculty don't have issues with the initiative but see higher level financing as what is at stake for the university. Darleen Baker suggested that the effects may be more long term. Ben Dixon offered members to consider changing their points of view and look at how the charter status could help the university better address some of the issues. In this view, there might be things positively affected should this legislation be passed. Mary Madis shared continued staff concern over the question of how staff will be affected. In numerous settings, individuals have said they don't know if staff will be better or worse off.

In conclusion, many members agreed that if there is an open, frank, and honest discussion, people will be more comfortable. Ray reminded members that we will revisit the charter university initiative at the November 15 meeting.

#### **IV. New Business**

The next meeting of the commission is Monday, October 25, from 10-12 in Conference Room C, Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center. Some of this meeting time will be spent in task forces. The question was raised about members who serve on more than one task force. It was suggested that some task forces may need to work sequentially.

#### **V. Announcements**

- ❖ On October 26<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. in Donaldson Brown Auditorium, Paul Hippolitus in the Office of Disability Employment Policy will be discussing the impact and importance of recruiting and hiring people with disabilities.
- ❖ On October 18 at 7:30 p.m., Chris Glaser will be speaking on, "Can Gay Marriage be Sacred?" in the Donaldson Brown Auditorium.
- ❖ Today is Indigenous People's Day and marks the beginning on American Indian Awareness Month. There are numerous events including speakers and movies throughout the month.
- ❖ October 19 is Diversity Career Day at the University of Virginia. Career Services has arranged for a bus to transport Virginia Tech students to the fair where there will be 110 companies present, some of whom do not come to VT to interview.
- ❖ Ben Dixon shared that the Pepsi Bottling Group requested a meeting with some of the Presidential Campus Enrichment Grant recipients. At the meeting they did a presentation on the company and included a lot of information about the role of diversity in their business.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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