

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, October 25, 2004

Minutes

Present: Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, Darleen Baker, Helen Crawford, Jeff Mann, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Mary Madis, LaChelle Waller, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, Hayward Farrar, Sam Cook, Cynthia Bonner, Fain Rutherford (for David Travis), Jon Wooge, Maxine Lyons, Valerie Hardcastle, Edwin Larroy Rodriguez, Susanna Rinehart, Monika Gibson

Absent: Marilyn Kershaw, Devi Gnyawali, Linda Woodard, Leon Geyer, Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Lois Berg, Brandon Smith

Guests: Jennie Reilly

I. Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

II. Chair Report

A. CEOD Statement and Updates on Related Issues

Ray Plaza began by distributing the revised roster of the commission, the list of task forces with members, a letter from President Steger regarding the upcoming speaker for Disabilities Awareness in Employment, and the most updated enrollment figures for fall 2004. Ray then provided an update on what has been happening on in response to the hate crime. The CEOD statement is on the university website with a list of other responses and programs that have occurred or are being planned. Cynthia Bonner shared that the division of student affairs is looking at surveys currently being administered that have campus climate questions. Since there are a number of surveys out there, they don't want to create an additional survey but plan to look at the data and possibly add questions to already existing surveys.

There was concern about asking questions that get at the "real" attitude, as opposed to questions which students can simply respond in the politically correct way. Susanna Rinehart questioned if there was a way to use some of the large classes as survey recipients. She also asked how the investigation is proceeding. It was shared that the police did have a suspect who passed a lie detector test.

The VT Student Chapter of the NAACP provided a paper copy of their statement at the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet. The statement, which included a list of demands, was not read publicly at the Banquet. Ray passed a copy around for members to review. He also shared that there was a parent discussion on Saturday as part of Parents' Weekend. At that program parents were asking about campus climate. At the end of the session, parents completed a survey on their perceptions. It was suggested that this information be shared with the group looking at campus climate, especially if there are some good questions to use on student surveys.

Conversation then moved to concern about the silence from the President's Office in response to the incident. Students have a lot of distrust now because they don't feel like there is any commitment from the president or BOV. It was shared that this president typically doesn't respond in that way and the individuals responsible for these issues did respond appropriately (Dr. Cross, Dr. Dixon, and Mr. Krause). Additionally, some members wanted to be sure that the students understood that just because the president has not spoken publicly does not mean the administration does not care. There are many people working on this and other campus climate issues. It was recommended if students really want to have their voices heard, they should be present in mass at the Student Affairs Committee meeting at 10:45 a.m.

in the Private Dining Room at D2. They are also welcome to attend the Academic Affairs Committee meeting at 8:30 a.m.

Concern was also raised around the titles used by Institutional Research and Planning Analysis in the Enrollment Figures for Fall 2004 are Indian, white, and foreign. These titles need to be changed; they speak loudly and we will never be able to make progress using descriptors like those.

B. Remaining Meeting Schedule

On November 15, Larry Hincker will attend and answer questions related to the Charter University Initiative. The following meeting on December 6, Norrine Bailey Spencer will discuss enrollment and Peggy Meszaros will share information on her research on campus climate. Last year there were six meetings scheduled in the spring. Ray suggested there may be a need to increase it to seven meetings this spring in order to get everything done.

C. Campus Climate Discussion and Brainstorming

Ray asked commission members to move into four groups to discuss campus climate issues. At least one member of the campus climate task force was in each group since they will be the ones to use this data as they begin to work. The issues/items addressed are listed below:

- Continue and increase active dialogue on racial relationships and what to do long term.
- Develop racial/diversity relationship programs in residence halls to improve climate.
- Students of diverse backgrounds need more interaction with one another.
- Commission needs to address renaming of Lee Hall and make recommendation.
- There may have been negative comments made to students regarding their racial/ethnic background.
- Child care is too expensive for graduate and undergraduate students (\$700-900/month).
- English classes for international students – in the past they were free, now there is a charge for short training by the English Language Institute – international students cannot pay this amount. It was suggested to speak with Don McKeon for more information and history on this issue.
- International students issues include: harassed in classroom setting or privately by faculty or students, need more help to adjust to expectations of this university, need more help to understand plagiarism as it differs across cultures, concern there may be a bias to report them to honor system by faculty members, students and faculty who are domestic shy away from working with international students, international students are concerned that some faculty run “sweat shops” (have them work more hours than their assistantships specify but they are fearful of complaining and losing funding and their visas).
- Issues of housekeeping staff include poor e-mail access, number of minority or international staff members who need potentially additional help (e.g. learning English communication skills).
- Faculty and staff need more training on diversity.
- Diversity speakers – when they come to campus it is rare to see top administrators and faculty present; need more ongoing dialogue after these presentations.
- Revitalize Multicultural Programs area with increased funding and resources.
- Expand recruitment and enrollment of minority students.
- Set up protocol for ensuring diversity on search committees.
- Expand financial aid.
- Improve climate for international students.
- Silence/lack of visibility by president and top administrators – options to address this include having other groups speak out (faculty senate).
- Provost is not actively or visibly involved with students.
- Lack of dean of students.
- Lack of involvement by students; lack of visibility of “wins.”
- Need to dispel stereotypes of Appalachian students/employees.

- Lack of critical mass – very few minorities (ex. One student who is black on a committee, one wheelchair user in a class).
- Does the lack of critical mass result from lack of public relations or lack of real commitment to aggressively recruit minorities (ex. There is a problem of departments seeing responsibility for paying for accommodations for new employees with disabilities – this is a disincentive for hiring); “we need to put our money and our mouth behind our policies.”
- Inappropriate comments made by employees (suggesting that diversity is a joke; persons unqualified – questioning selection of employees for certain positions).
- Gym pass issue for partners – question of whether JMU got guidance on this issue as they recently rescinded their passes.
- Not enough handicap parking places – Major Williams/Torgersen area, spaces by Women’s Center gone.
- How to encourage resistant students to get engaged in learning about diversity? They won’t respond if told or ordered to do so. Help students see that they have a vested personal interest in diversity; there is a role for faculty in helping this happen; teaching respect for all people; need to find more models or outlets for students to learn where their vested interest in diversity lies; how to draw women students.

B. Initial Task Force Gatherings

Given that there is some overlap in membership on various task forces, Ray identified Campus Climate, Diversity Summit, and Exit Surveys as being the three most critical and will meet immediately following the meeting.

III. Old Business

A. International Strategic Plan

The CEOD recommendations were forwarded to Mark McNamee, John Dooley, and S.K. DeDatta. Kim Beisecker will continue to keep the commission updated on the progress and status of this plan.

B. Charter University Initiative

Ray forwarded all the questions generated at the last meeting to Minnis and Larry so they can be addressed during the meeting on November 15.

IV. New Business

A. Academic and Student Affairs Task Force – Diversity Implications

Impending the retirement of Lanny Cross as vice president for student affairs, the provost has convened a task force to look at possibly reconfiguring the division of student affairs by combining academic and student affairs under a new provost position. Ray, Ben Dixon, and Monika Gibson are all on this task force. They will keep the commission updated as this group continues to meet. The plan is to look at different models at other institutions. There will also be two open forums on November 8 from 12-1 and November 11 from 4-5. Some questions include how student affairs can be more effective in providing services. A question was raised about whether this is about cutting costs. Ben Dixon responded that it would be unlikely that any reconfiguration or restructuring would result in cost cutting.

V. Announcements

On October 26th 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.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m. so that the task forces could meet.

Respectfully submitted,

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