

**Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, November 15, 2004**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, Darleen Baker, Marilyn Kershaw, Devi Gnyawali, Linda Woodard, Leon Geyer, Jeff Mann, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Mary Madis, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, Hayward Farrar, Cynthia Bonner, David Travis, Jon Wooge, Valerie Hardcastle, Edwin Larroy Rodriquez, Susanna Rinehart, Monika Gibson, Lois Berg, Brandon Smith

**Absent:** Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Helen Crawford, Sam Cook, LaChelle Waller, Maxine Lyons

**Guests:** Larry Hincker, Ellen Plummer, Mary Grace Campos, Shawn Braxton, Michael Smith, Emenike La, Jennie Reilly

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

The chair asked that the student representatives' presentation be added before the task force updates. The agenda was approved as revised.

**II. Chair Report**

Ray Plaza began by having the guests introduce themselves. He then passed out a chronology of events from September 26, 2004 through November 14, 2004, and reminded members of the responsibility of the commission. The President has stated that he sees the commission as the formal university vehicle to address campus climate issues. Ray stressed the importance of members communicating with their constituent groups.

Given the amount of work that needs to be done, an additional meeting will be added to the schedule this semester on Monday, December 13. While this is exam week and some individuals may not be able to attend, those who can attend can help move agenda items forward. The schedule for spring semester is still being worked on and will be presented before the end of the semester. Finally, Ray passed out the holiday memo issued by Ben Dixon, Lanny Cross, and David Travis.

**III. Charter University**

Larry Hincker provided some background information on the Charter University Initiative and answered questions. The basic idea of the legislation is that the three institutions would accept less money for the state in return for more freedom (in areas like procurement and human resources). In addressing the concern of increased tuition, Larry said that VT plans to double the institutional funds for financial aid over the next 5 years (all need-based). A question was raised regarding whether those funds would be in the form of grants or loans. Larry didn't know the answer but promised to follow-up with Dwight Shelton and get back to the commission.

One potential negative to the charter university is if the General Assembly chooses to ignore higher education funding needs. A question was raised regarding how the university would supplement the loss of funds from the state. Larry answered that this could be done through tuition increases, internal efficiencies, and overnight deposits. Additionally, the university would like the ability to offer optional retirement for classified staff which is not currently possible.

#### **IV. Briefing on the Board of Visitors Meeting**

Ben Dixon shared two documents that were distributed at the Academic Affairs Committee meeting of the BOV. The strategies document references heavily the short position paper on diversity and is the operational plan the university needs to launch in order to have transformational change. The work of the task forces of the commission can be folded into this plan and the CEOD can make recommendations along the way.

The second handout was a copy of Dr. McNamee's power point presentation. It provides details on the status of women and minorities at Virginia Tech. The Student Affairs Committee also dealt with campus climate issues and heard from Shawn Braxton, president of the student chapter of the NAACP.

In response to all these issues and incidents, a number of people have met to discuss what needs to happen around communication strategies. There is a need for a communication campaign to highlight all of the positive things that are happening around campus that most students, faculty, and staff don't know about. This extends beyond the website. If members have ideas about ways to get the word out to students and others, Ben asked that people send them either to the Office of Multicultural Affairs or to University Relations. This campaign needs to be both internal and external. An example of a new external project is The Prism, a news magazine that will be published twice/yearly for alumni of color.

Valerie Hardcastle suggested one way to improve the university's image would be to get The Chronicle of Higher Education to do a follow-up piece on Virginia Tech to show how the university has worked through these problems. While many agreed that this would be a good step, there was some concern about whether The Chronicle would even be interested in this positive piece. It was also suggested to get articles in the Journal for Blacks in Higher Education and Black Issues in Higher Education. Ray added that there will be a session at the ACPA national conference on the commission and the work the university is doing in the area of diversity/campus climate. Ben shared that as a member institution of HACU, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, the university was able to send two individuals, one faculty and one staff, to the annual conference.

#### **V. Proposals from Student Representatives**

Shawn Braxton, president of the student chapter of the NAACP, was the first to speak. He had no formal proposal but had some questions he wanted to ask. He was specifically concerned about the issue of harassment and was wondering if the university had researched what other peer institutions have in place. As an example, he read the harassment definition from the University of Maryland. David Travis shared that the university has done benchmarking against peer institutions and is currently revising the harassment policy which needs a lot of work. Additionally the university is looking at some on-line harassment training programs as a possible way to train faculty and staff.

Emenike La, president of DROP Alliance (Direct Resistance of Privilege), presented three proposals. The first was the creation of a racial harassment policy to include protocol for handling situations when they arise. Ellen Plummer shared that a group of individuals have been working hard at a workplace violence policy which incorporates and addresses these issues of concern. It was stressed that there needs to be a policy that addresses students, too, and not just faculty and staff. Additionally, there need to be consequences that fit the crime.

La then shared that they have read the report by the university regarding Lee Hall and believe that the concern regarding conclusive evidence is unwarranted and absurd. They see Lee Hall as a clear example of institutional bias and want the name removed. They do not support the creation of another committee to look at the history because they feel another report is unnecessary. The hall could be renamed PATH House (Progressive Action Toward Humanity).

The final proposal was to create a learning community in Lee Hall named PATH House. This community would create a welcoming place for all students and see to educate the whole person. DROP Alliance is looking for the commission to get behind their proposals and give the institutional support necessary to move them along.

There was considerable conversation around the learning community. Some concern was raised about the de-diversification and segregation of students. Kim Beisecker stressed the need to have goals specified before working on the mechanics of a learning community. Valerie Hardcastle suggested the commission endorse the idea of the learning community since someone else will work on the mechanics. However, Pat Hyer suggested it would be more advisable for the commission to meet with those responsible for learning communities in order to gather more information before moving forward. Her concern was endorsing something that might not be able to come to fruition and the frustration that would result. Ray suggested that this discussion be continued at the December 6 meeting and he will try to see if some individuals from Student Programs who work with theme housing and learning communities could attend to answer questions and provide more information. He will also see if Betsy Flanagan can attend to provide information on the process for naming buildings.

An additional question was raised around the concepts of narrow-tailoring and strict scrutiny. Hayward Farrar suggested that some time be spent informing people about what those terms mean because there is a lot of confusion. Ben Dixon shared that the narrow tailoring issue will likely be incorporated into the Diversity Summit on January 21, 2005.

Ben also informed the commission that DROP Alliance presented a pledge at the Face to Face conference on Saturday. He encouraged members to sign up for the pledge and take a good look at it. Additionally, members of the BOV are very interested in having a university-wide statement on the principles of living in community. The administration hopes to present something at the March meeting for the BOV to endorse. This may need to be worked on quickly so that it can go through University Council before the board meeting.

#### **VI. Task Force Updates**

Edd Sewell will send electronically an update on the campus climate task force which has met and has some ideas for the spring.

The next meeting is Monday, December 6 at 10:00 a.m. in the Executive Conference Room. The meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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