

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, December 13, 2004

Minutes

Present: Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, Marilyn Kershaw, Devi Gnyawali, Linda Woodard, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Kim Beisecker, Fain Rutherford (for David Travis), Jon Wooge, LaChelle Waller, Maxine Lyons, Leon Geyer, Mary Madis, Valerie Hardcastle, Monika Gibson, Darleen Baker

Absent: Jeff Mann, Hassan Aref, Hayward Farrar, Susanna Rinehart, Cynthia Bonner, Muhammad Chughtai, Sam Cook, Lois Berg, Edwin Larroy Rodriquez, Brandon Smith

Guests: Mary Grace Campos, Jennie Reilly, Kurt Krause

I. Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

II. Chair Report

Ray Plaza shared information on a meeting last Wednesday focused on the future of Multicultural Programs (including the Black Cultural Center and Multicultural Center). There will be a position opening in January when Kimberly Philpott leaves and it is not certain how it will be filled. There were three options discussed at the meeting. The first option is to keep Multicultural Programs in Student Life. The second option is to move it to Student Activities since their funding is auxiliary as opposed to the E&G funding for Student Life. The third option is to move it under the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The discussion lasted for two hours with no consensus. There was considerable concern about the stability of the unit. Michael Goode suggested that the community wait to see what happens with the Division of Student Affairs before making any changes in the status and structure of Multicultural Programs.

Ray then provided an update on the Student Affairs Task Force. They are currently looking at two different organizational models. One model is a traditional model with academic affairs and student affairs operating separately but with some elements being moved from one area to the other. The other model is a bridge model which keeps both units intact but makes a third unit with elements from both which also reports to the provost. Their last meeting is today and they will send their recommendations to the provost for his consideration. A question was raised about what needed fixing in student affairs. Ray responded that there were issues about how to better partner the two units as well as issues surrounding learning communities, classes for credit, and program assessment which cut across both student affairs and academic affairs.

Ray then passed out some three universities' principles of community statements. Pat Hyer provided the background information on the university's need to develop a statement on the commitment to diversity. At the November 8 board meeting the Rector and the Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee requested a statement that they could approve at their March meeting. Some university officials shared what had worked well at previous institutions where they had been employed.

Ray asked that members review the three models distributed and send any comments to Alicia or Ben by December 20th. There is a very tight timeline in order to get the statement before the board for the March meeting. The intent is to have it ready in January to present to faculty and staff senates. The final edits will be made during the January 24 and 31 CEOD meetings so that it can be ready by the February 15 deadline for the BOV. Once a draft is ready for dissemination, members should share with constituent groups and get feedback. A copy of the process and timeline was distributed. There was consensus on the

need to work hard on the mass communication and marketing strategy for the VT Principles of Community. Pat shared some of the ideas generated at a preliminary meeting which included wallet cards, press releases, a large version of the document with the Rector beside it (like the huge checks that are made for lottery winners), full page ad in the CT, etc. It was suggested that advertising go beyond the university and also that it would be better if the statement was succinct. Another recommendation was to post it in all classrooms like the Honor Code. Leon Geyer also suggested that some faculty might take a few minutes of class time to discuss the draft document with students. It may also be possible to send it to Diversity Summit participants prior to the summit.

III. Task Force Updates

A. Diversity Summit

Michael Goode said the flier for the Diversity Summit will go out on email this afternoon. The theme is Valuing our Differences: Celebrating Diversity.

B. Campus Climate

Edd Sewell shared that much of what the task force had discussed at their last meeting has been superseded by other things. Cynthia Bonner has asked John Muffo to pull data on student related issues from his various surveys and Susan Willis-Walton has distributed the exit survey data. There is a lot of information from the exit surveys that will need to be whittled down. Linda Woodard said they are now working on a survey for new employees and a draft of that will be shared with the commission.

IV. Old Business

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

Ray distributed a draft of recommendations on how to proceed and resolve the issue so it doesn't come up again. Many members liked recommendations one through three, especially the display to provide historical retrospect. Susan recommended that the archivists be involved and the display be high quality and well protected. It would serve as a way to keep our history in the forefront. It was also suggested that while the commission should endorse items one through three, that four through fourteen should be done under our own initiative and not as a response to Lee Hall. Additionally, it was noted that the display should not be limited to Lee Hall. Edd reminded members that there are three buildings named after women and other buildings that have a role to play in understanding our history. Jean reminded people that Paul Derring was one of the first employees with a disability at Virginia Tech. Kurt Krause added his perspective which included questions like, Who owns it? Who maintains it? Who keeps it fresh? Putting a display in a residence hall doesn't necessarily allow everyone to see it. He suggested it could possibly be part of a new visitor's center which is in the list of projects in the next six year plan. Other possible locations for a display include Special Collections in the Library and Squires Student Center.

Conversation then moved to implementing a more aggressive plan to include a DVD that includes the history of Virginia Tech and current issues. This could be sent or given to new students as well as new faculty and staff at orientation. It could also be accessible from the homepage. Issues about where the town of Blacksburg fits in with the history as well as Kentland Farm, Reynolds Homestead, etc. were raised. Valerie recommended that the commission and university not get bogged down in the "right" history and that we take the history and turn it into something positive.

The commission will work on separating recommendations into short term and long term and present them to the President on February 1. Ben reminded members of the need to communicate our recommendations and actions to the groups who are advocating the name change. Rather than sending an email, it was recommended that a more personal approach would be appropriate and someone should visit them at their meetings and provide them with an update in January.

B. Peace Garden Sculpture

Kurt Krause provided an update on the status of the project. There was a meeting last Thursday with various university officials. He was concerned about the university allowing an outside entity to put something on our property. However, he added, there are no clear cut policies on art work or how it gets approved or where it will go. There was a lot of pride in this project and the university architect had spent time trying to make this an aesthetically pleasing. Unfortunately, the location designated (the peace garden) doesn't have the traffic the university would like for commissioned art and it is in an area at risk for vandalism. Additionally, it is on the route to the stadium during football games and is not conducive for a litter free environment. Kurt has requested a stop to this project and has put in two calls to the President of the rotary group that is supporting the project. While the mission and passion are good, this project needs to go on town land. He believes it is fundamentally wrong for enough reasons to stop it at this time. The President's office is aware of the commission's concern regarding this project but Kurt requested a more formal statement from the commission for him to share as he talks with various parties about stopping the project. Pat moved that the commission finds this a problematic project and urges the university to reconsider. The motion was seconded and approved.

V. New Business

University Council Realignment

Ray distributed information on the realignment of University Council based on work done by the task force on membership. The biggest impact for the commission is the proposal to have CEOD elect two representatives to replace what is currently stated as one student representative from the African American student community elected by the Black Organizations Council and one representative from the African American faculty and staff community elected by the Black Caucus. If passed, the commission would need to determine the criteria for how to select those two seats. This need for change was identified because it violates the equal protection clause since the slots are selected by race. A question was raised about why this is illegal since the groups that select those representatives are open to anyone (Black Organizations Council and Black Caucus). A further question was raised about whether diversity needs to be more than black and white. One response could be to rotate the position designation by the eight community groups represented on the commission. That would only work if it was a one-year term and even then it would take years to rotate among all those groups.

There was some conversation about whether the slots were needed since the Chair of the Commission and the Vice President for Multicultural Affairs both have seats on University Council. Ray suggested that members read the document and share any questions with him. He will then pass them on to the task force.

VI. Next Meeting

Presentations by Norrine Bailey Spencer and Peggy Meszaros have been postponed to the end of January or early February. The next meeting is Monday, January 24 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