

**Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, February 28, 2005**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Ray Plaza, Pat Hyer, Shamiso Rowley (for Hayward Farrar), Susanna Rinehart, Cynthia Bonner, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Jean Brickey, Michael Goode, Ross Edmonds, Jon Wooge, Linda Woodard, Susan Anderson, Leon Geyer, Ruth Grene, Craig Brians, LaChelle Waller

**Absent:** Darlene Baker, Jeff Mann, Hassan Aref, Sam Cook, Brandon Smith, Marilyn Kershaw, Susan Willis-Walton, Kim Beisecker, David Travis, Edwin Larroy Rodriquez, Monika Gibson, Mary Madis, Valerie Hardcastle, Devy Gnyawali, Maxine Lyons, Patcharee Phonsvirajati

**Guests:** Mary Grace Campos, Ellen Plummer, Tom Brown

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented. Ray thanked everyone for coming out amid the weather. He noted that we couldn't cancel due to the nature of the agenda and the schedule.

**II. Chair Report**

Ray shared a copy of the editorials written by Provost McNamee. They appeared in The Collegiate Times on Wednesday, 2/23 and Thursday, 2/24. He also thanked Kim Beisecker for serving as his sub at the last University Council meeting.

Ray also shared that the president is currently reviewing the Lee Hall recommendations. Due to meetings in Richmond, Dr. Steger hasn't had a chance to respond yet, but we hope to hear soon so that we can begin to implement the short-term recommendations.

**III. Old Business: Latest Revision of the VT Principles of Community**

Ray shared the latest revision to the VT Principles of Community. He highlighted that the main change has been the re-incorporation of the listing that includes "age, color, disability, gender..." He explained that this was originally in the document, removed, and then added back.

A motion to approve was made and seconded. In the discussion it was agreed that the official title would be "The Virginia Tech Principles of Community," rather than the abbreviated "VT." In addition, the usage of the quotation marks in the very last line that mentions Ut Prosim would be changed to be more in line with proper usage.

It was noted that the re-incorporation of the listing was a positive step, but it was unfortunate as to how it all came about. We need to learn from this experience. Additional conversations focused on the need for accountability. It was noted that the language used in the VT Principles is consistent with University policy. The hope is that having the VT Principles will help to encourage a dialogue on current and past issues. It was noted that the Commission is the gatekeeper and guardian of the VT Principles and it will play a critical role in its implementation.

Several members noted that the VT Principles could be used in training students and faculty could use it as a part of their class syllabi, similar to the statement on services with students with disabilities. Ben and Pat agreed to finalize the items for the Board meeting.

As the discussion concluded, a formal vote was taken. The revised and final draft of the "Virginia Tech Principles of Community" was unanimously adopted.

## **IV. Discussion surrounding the Student and Staff Orientation Processes at Virginia Tech**

### **A. Student Orientation**

Tom Brown, Director of Student Life, shared that the timing for this discussion is ideal since they are looking at doing something different due to the dated nature of the current "VT Video." He provided a historical overview. In the early 90's, the topic of diversity was handled through a talk-show format like Oprah. This eventually evolved into a video presentation called "Community of Conscience." By the mid'90's, this video had become too dated, and skits were developed entitled "Once upon a Community." These skits then led to the development of the "VT Video" which was based on the then popular VH1 show called "Pop-up Video." The video consisted of student testimonials and facts about VT would "pop-up." The video not only addressed diversity, it also tackled sexual assault and alcohol.

At this point, Orientation wants to do something different and are looking for university feedback at an open forum scheduled for March 24. They are currently investigating what other schools are doing and most schools similar to Virginia Tech are doing more of the skit approach. It was also noted that UVA has a program called "Different Voices, Common Threads," which consists of a brief introduction of the history of the campus and focus on specific items. It leads into live testimonials from students, faculty and staff. VT has requested a copy of this program. It has been noted to be very powerful at UVA.

Tom passed out a handout to the members. He added that it has become increasing more difficult to get students to open-up and talk about diversity, but with this new format, alcohol and sexual assault will be dealt with separately, allowing more time to focus on diversity issues. The floor was then open for discussion. A number of items were addressed including the need for the continuation of the small group discussions, the need to probe deeper with our discussions about diversity, and the need for actual stories and testimonials.

One member asked why we share bad things. Pat responded that we need to portray the true picture of what happens at Virginia Tech to remain credible with various audiences. Shamiso agreed and commented on the importance of honesty. It was suggested that it would be powerful for students to hear stories of students who may have had a negative experience but would not change their decision of coming to Virginia Tech. Mary Grace asked how the VT Principles of Community could be incorporated. She suggested that if they go with testimonials that they follow them with the respective bolded statements of the principles.

Shamiso asked if the terms of prejudice, discrimination are defined? And if so, how do we define them? She mentioned 'Are you a ...ist? It is important that we breakdown the terms. Tom noted they had never deliberately broken down the terms as a whole group. He really liked the 'Are you a ...ist?' Ross indicated you could also ask, "Did you ever make fun of someone?" "Have you ever done this?" Others added, "Did you tease someone?" "Why did you do this?" Pat offered another way to talk about "isms". Virginia Valian, author of Why So Slow?" describes gender schemas which both men and women utilize. For example, both men and women evaluate vitas with the name of a woman as less qualified than the identical vita with a male name.

Tom asked that if there were other groups that we need to involve to please let him know. He also asked that the group look at the last page of the packet and consider answering those questions by the end of March.

Leon made the point that we need to better collaborate with the faculty in order to make sure that the discussion is ongoing rather than just at orientation. Tom liked the idea of how the staff and faculty are

used in the UVA program. He also mentioned that he is working with Kim Beisecker to ensure that the program meets the needs of the International students.

Tom concluded by sharing that they are on a rather tight timeframe. The hope would be to convene a working group in April and May to develop the project, have it tested, and then train the Orientation Leaders in mid-June.

Tom also passed out flyers for the first-ever Campus Climate Check-up that will be held on Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup> from 6 – 7:30pm in the Donaldson Brown Dining Room. Pat noted that we need to make sure that we incorporate the VT Principles of Community in this effort.

### **B. Staff Orientation**

Linda Woodard, Assistant Vice-President for Personnel Services, shared information about the staff orientation program. Currently, it is primarily a program that highlights the benefits package. They are looking at ways to incorporate other topics. She passed out several examples of the packet that new employees receive at orientation.

She noted that there is a different orientation for off-campus sites. Her office provides the information then does a lot of phone consultations to answer questions. They do not travel from site to site doing the orientation.

Nine months ago they started to look at expanding the efforts for the staff. Any expansion would need to incorporate lunch, greatly increasing the cost and complicating the logistics. Typically, they try to capture new employees within their first week on the job. Each week, they hold separate sessions for faculty and staff due to the differences in the packages.

In regards to Staff Orientation, they are looking at incorporating three modules that would be between 20 – 30 minutes each. The first module would be one designed by Environmental Health and Safety, the second would be designed by Instructional Technology, and the third would be called “University Citizenship.” This module could address issues of respect/civility, the VT Principles of Community, harassment policies, and other related items.

One of the dilemmas faced with the third module is that new employees would be trained and sent to offices where their supervisors and other co-workers might not be trained. Linda noted that other things would be needed in place to help the rest of the community. Another challenge is that it would not be ideal to have an all-day program. Typically, after a ½ day of benefits, it is hard for most to keep their focus. Initial desire would be to pilot something and then alter accordingly.

She noted that the biggest obstacle would be finding individuals willing to work on the third module. Her staff is not geared toward this area. Linda is looking at the development of a small working group that could consist of Multicultural Fellows, CEOD members, and representatives from the Office for Equal Opportunity, Provost’s Office, and the Women’s Center. This group could create a meaningful module.

Linda also noted that a change to the process would impact the off-campus sites, as it would be a challenge for them to access the modules. It is possible that we could use more web-based information. Linda noted that her area is looking at different presentation software for distance learning possibilities to reach these areas.

Leon noted that we need longer term training efforts. Linda suggested some of the orientation could be done via the vice president and college areas which could allow for more frequent training beyond the first week. Unfortunately, Personnel is not at a point where they can logistically plan and schedule all of

this. Pat noted that it would be difficult to staff frequent college-based training initiatives with current personnel. However, the administration is expanding employee training and leadership development on several fronts through the Provost's office, Equal Opportunity and Multicultural Affairs, so orientation programs will not stand alone. She noted that CEUT addresses diversity issues important to pedagogy, Ellen indicated that we cannot forget graduate students, postdocs, and wage employees. It was noted that Dr. DePauw has been spearheading efforts for the graduate students.

Ross mentioned the possibility of a mentoring program. This would train the trainers to help new employees. Linda mentioned that adding more time to staff orientation would help in providing a better overview of different resources that are available. Currently, her office has developed a draft of a brochure that highlights where employees can go if they need assistance. Pat noted efforts made in Extension in which new employees have a job orientation plan in which they must complete a number of different learning tasks. Maybe such a program could be done, and then each college could hold a program each semester.

Jean noted that it could be a component of their job. She highlighted the fact that classified staff work for the first few months on job probation. It could be a component of getting off job probation. Pat liked that possibility to structuring some sort of effort. Linda indicated that she would check into the extension process. She indicated that she is in the process of hiring to help with this effort.

#### **IV. Announcements**

Ray reminded everyone about the Al Sharpton speech on Wednesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. He noted that tickets could be picked up from the UUSA Ticket Booth in Squires.

Ellen made mention of supporting Women's History Month, and Susan shared that Take Back the Night is scheduled for Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### **V. Next Meeting**

The next commission meeting is March 21st. Dr. Ford will be in attendance to discuss faculty orientation, and we will also look at the implementation of the VT Principles of Community.

The meeting was adjourned at 12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Plaza, Chair, Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity