

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, March 22, 2004

Minutes

**Present:** Edd Sewell, Devi Gnyawali, Trey Church, Pat Hyer, Helen Crawford, Keohi Council (for Peggy Quesinberry), Linda Woodard, Jean Elliott, Kimberly Philpott, Kim Beisecker, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Bill Greenberg, Ray Plaza, Susan Willis-Walton, Jean Brickey, Jon Wooge, Bev Watford (for Hassan Aref), Valerie Hardcastle, Brandon Bull, Stefanie Linden (for Gavin Luter), Lois Berg

**Absent:** Meredith Katz, Sam Cook, Lanny Cross, Darleen Baker, Hayward Farrar, Susanna Rinehart, Mary Madis, Ellen Plummer, Betty Fine

**Guest:** Jennie Reilly

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

Edd Sewell added committee reports to the agenda. The agenda was approved as amended.

**II. Announcements**

The following announcements were made:

- Gay Awareness Week is March 28 – April 2. Trey Church passed around postcards with information for the week. Wednesday, March 31<sup>st</sup> is Wear jeans if you support gay equality day.
- Disabilities Awareness Week is April 4. On April 4 the Gallaudet Dancers will be performing at 1:00 p.m. in Haymarket Theatre, Squires. On April 6 Salome Heyward, an African American attorney who is a legal expert and author of numerous books on disability accommodations in higher education, is speaking from 10-12 in the Donaldson Brown Auditorium. She will discuss how faculty/staff can manage disability compliance with confidence and compassion.
- Thursday, March 25 is Take Back the Night
- April 11-17 is Holocaust Awareness Week. The keynote speaker is Severin Hochberg, a historian with the Holocaust Museum in D.C. He will speak on Wednesday, April 14.
- Lois Berg is speaking on Tuesday, March 23 at 12:30 at the Women's Center. The title for her brown bag session is, "Directions for Life: Left Without a Right."
- April 7<sup>th</sup> is the program on the US Patriot Act. After a presentation on what the Patriot Act is, there will be a dialogue. Please let Kim Beisecker know if you have suggestions on who to invite. Diane Bell was mentioned as a possible participant in the dialogue.
- April 7<sup>th</sup> from 2-5p.m. in Conference Rooms D&E, DBHCC is Managing Programs that Contribute to Diversity in the Current Legal Environment.
- Kim Beisecker passed out brochures for International Week which begins April 3. For the first time it includes a reunion of international students and scholars. There is also a parade of nations at 2 p.m. on the drillfield on April 9. There have been efforts to have other units support international week and expand its presence. This is evident in dining halls which will have international foods, a speaker sponsored by the Pamplin College of

Business, international music used for aerobic classes through rec sports, and special features for the international athletes.

- March 25 is Shattering the Silence: Creating an Inclusive Campus Community, a video presentation and dialogue guided by VT faculty members about campus climate and our contributions to it.
- March 24 Belle Wheelan is speaking as part of Graduate Education Week. Synthia St. James is also speaker that night. She is an African American artist who designed the Kwanzaa stamp.
- The Joint Committee on Diversity and Multicultural Affairs is sponsoring a Diversity Week April 11-17. Details will be provided as they are confirmed.

Kim Beisecker reported on the international student who had a pulmonary embolism. He was in a coma for 18 days but has come out of the coma and has no brain damage. He does, however, have some damage to his right arm. He is from India and some of the profits raised during International week will go to support some of his incidental expenses.

### **III. Discussion/Sharing Feedback from Constituent Groups on the Working Document – Position Statement Reaffirming our Civil Liberties**

Jean Brickey reported that the Commission on Classified Staff Affairs (CCSA) questioned the purpose of the position statement and did not see what it would accomplish. There were concerns that there were details and procedures for some departments but not others. They didn't feel like departments should be singled out. They also thought there could be a conflict with other policies like the computer privacy policy (Pat Hyer told the committee there is no conflict with the computer privacy policy that is currently being revised). They also felt they needed to hear from Kay Heidbreder/legal counsel to be sure we are in full compliance. They recommended the Staff Senate not endorse the position statement. The Staff Senate had many of the same concerns as CCSA and tabled it indefinitely. They also recommended that senators go to the legislators if they really disapprove of the law.

In response, the commission members were reminded that libraries and police departments are the two entities the law actually mentions. Helen Crawford stated that the library representative on the Faculty Senate approved the statement. Jean reiterated concern regarding the unusualness of the position statement, its ambiguity, and concern that it would create more confusion.

Jennie Reilly reported that there were two responses from the ADA Executive Committee. One was in favor and said it is the right thing to do and good for the commission to support. The other response was not in favor of the position statement. That person felt the statement is too political and would damage the credibility of the commission.

Trey Church reported that he was going to present the statement to the Commission on Student Affairs and asked if someone who is more knowledgeable would go with him to help answer questions. Kim Beisecker offered to attend the meeting with him.

Kimberly Philpott reported that there were no concerns from the Black Caucus.

Regarding questions about the library's role, Pat said that Eileen Hitchingham isn't required to do anything even if the position statement is passed. Kim Beisecker reported that it is standard practice for many other libraries. It was stated that this is a mild political statement and an improvement over the one passed earlier by the commission. A motion was made and seconded to approve the faculty senate version of the position statement. There were 20 in favor and 2 opposed.

It was suggested that someone present the position statement at the dialogue on April 7 with the distinction made between a policy and position statement.

#### **IV. Discussion of Revised Standards Document**

Ben Dixon began the discussion and commented that the Student Success Standard was changed to the Student Development Standard. Pat Hyer voiced concern regarding the Legal and Inclusion Standards. There were suggested revisions to the wording to avoid the contradiction in the two standards. Pat wanted to be sure that people feel they can shape programs that target groups as long as they don't automatically exclude. There was another suggestion to just have an inclusion standard and remove the legal one. A question was then raised regarding how the standards affect student activities and where fraternities and sororities fit in this. Ray Plaza reminded members that the law gives fraternities and sororities the right to exist as single-sex organizations. After considerable discussion, Edd asked Pat and Ben to meet and revise the wording for the standards to either collapse into one or have two. Anyone who has specific comments or recommendations should send them directly to Pat or Ben.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully submitted,

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