

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, April 16, 2004

Minutes

**Present:** Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, Helen Crawford, Linda Woodard, Jean Elliott, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Jon Wooge, Ellen Plummer, Betty Fine, Lois Berg, Valerie Hardcastle, Susanna Rinehart, Bill Greenberg, Mary Madis, Meredith Katz, Sam Cook, Kimberly Philpott

**Absent:** Devi Gnyawali, Susan Willis-Walton, Stefanie Linden (for Gavin Luter), Hayward Farrar, Trey Church, Darleen Baker, Lanny Cross, Brandon Bull, Keohi Council, Kim Beisecker, Hassan Aref

**Guests:** Diane Bell, Jennie Reilly

**I. Adoption of Agenda**

Edd announced that one additional meeting of the Commission has been scheduled for Monday, May 10 in 325 Burruss Hall. The election of a new chair and vice chair and committee reports will be moved to the agenda for the May 10 meeting. A motion was made and seconded to adopt the revised agenda. The motion carried. There was some clarification about the chair and vice chair. The operating guidelines for the commission state, "The chair and the vice chair will be elected from among eligible faculty or staff members of the commission. Students and ex-officio members are not eligible to serve as chair or vice-chair. Election of the chair and vice-chair will be done each year usually in the spring." Pat Hyer reminded representatives whose terms are ending that they are eligible to serve for two consecutive terms.

**III. Revised Standards**

Pat distributed the most current standards document with changes and recommendations from many on the commission. She highlighted some of the changes and went through each standard. There were some additional edits which were discussed and consensus reached. There was a motion to made and seconded to approve the standards with the edits. The motion passed. The final version of the standards follows the minutes and will be sent forward to University Council as part of the minutes from the April 26 meeting. The standards will be shared at the second workshop, Best Practices for Managing Activities that Promote Diversity at Virginia Tech, on April 28 from 2:00-5:00 p.m. in Hillcrest Hall. The standards will also be posted on numerous websites.

**IV. Diane Bell**

Edd had asked Diane Bell to share some of her thoughts and observations from this year having served as a guest at many of our meetings. Diane began talking about how anthropologists work, asking questions like, "How do the natives understand themselves?" She shared that she learned a lot about Virginia Tech as a community from its symbols, myths, rituals, kinship and marriage patterns, and others aspects of our culture. She was struck by the loyalty people have to Virginia Tech and that people really care about the students. The flip side to this intense loyalty is that people take it very hard and are hurt when they don't get rewarded for the work they do. There is

a real “can-do” attitude here. Diane also shared observations about the drillfield as a cultural space from reflecting our command and control of the military history, while also being used in very different ways, such as the display of the clothesline project. She also said that she investigated some of the cases at Virginia Tech that have made the national press and that many are about sexual violence. While this may be painful to accept, she suggests that the university must know its history or it will relive it. There are also many who are conflict averse. She suggested the commission think about the ways in which it deals with conflict. There was considerable debate/conflict around the Patriot Act resolution that was never really processed. Additionally, she observed from the brainstorming session that there is an unresolved question of, “What does diversity mean?” The commission needs a framework for thinking about this, including an understanding of how various kinds of “difference” are affected by power and therefore may command more of our attention. Diane then engaged members in an activity to think about whom they represent and what they most want done for their constituent groups. After some conversations about those issues, Diane closed with the recommendation that tolerance is not enough and the institution needs to look at the incentives and rewards for this work. It is difficult to change systems, it takes time, and it is not always a win-win situation.

#### **V. Announcements**

Edd asked for volunteers for a committee to select the two names to forward to the president for the At-Large Representative position that needs to be filled. Edd, Kimberly Philpott, and Meredith Katz agreed to serve on that committee. Copies of a draft of the VT International Mission were distributed as information. Ben Dixon also distributed a summary of some of the recommendations made in a report done on the Office for Equal Opportunity.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully submitted,

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