

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, September 27, 2004

Minutes

Present: Edd Sewell, Pat Hyer, , Linda Woodard, Edwin Larroy Rodriquez, Laura Hickerson, Ben Dixon, Ray Plaza, Jean Brickey, Mary Madis, LaChelle Waller, Kimberly Philpott, Devi Gnyawali, Susan Willis-Walton, Michael Goode, Hayward Farrar, Kim Beisecker, Cynthia Bonner, David Travis, Jon Wooge, Maxine Lyons, Sam Cook, Brandon Smith

Absent: Darleen Baker, Helen Crawford, Jeff Mann, Valerie Hardcastle, Susanna Rinehart, Leon Geyer, Hassan Aref, Muhammad Chughtai, Lois Berg, Myrna Callison

Guests: Ellen Plummer, Christine Dennis, Karen DePauw

I. Adoption of Agenda

Kimberly Philpott asked that the charter university initiative be added to the agenda under new business. The revised agenda was approved.

II. Chair Report

Ray Plaza welcomed two new members, Brandon Smith, representing the Joint Committee on Diversity and Multicultural Affairs through SGA, and Sam Cook, representing American Indian Studies. Ray then distributed a handout on the role of the task force and shared his rationale for this approach. The benefits include greater flexibility and a designated and specified timeframe for completion, increased efficiency, the ability to work on various items simultaneously, utilization of expertise of members, and provides an opportunities for members to become experts on a particular topic and bring recommendations forward to the commission. Ray also suggested the following as potential agenda/task force items:

- International Strategic Plan
- Short BOV Paper on Diversity
- Harassment Policy
- Diversity Research Initiative
- Diversity in the Faculty Dossier used for Promotion and Tenure
- Results of the Exit Survey
- Workplace Violence
- Affirmative Action Plan
- Student Enrollment
- Campus Climate Issues
- Revisions/Updates to the Diversity Strategic Plan
- How to Market the Standards Document to the University Community
- Diversity Summit

It was suggested that the Charter University Initiative be added to the list of topics. Ray asked that members review the list and let him know if they have additional topics. He also indicated that the committee structure could still exist but in a different way.

Ray reported that the first meeting of University Council was last week. The majority of the meeting was spent with a presentation and question and answer session by Minnis Ridenour on the Charter University Initiative. Commission chairs also provided updates. Ray has shared the list of task force items with both the president and the provost.

III. Old Business

Report and Recommendations from the Task Force on the International Strategic Plan

Edd Sewell reported that he, Kim Beisecker, and Devi Gnyawali had one meeting to discuss the documents. Another meeting was held with Edd, Leon Geyer, Ron Daniel and others to discuss the goals and objectives for undergraduate education. The task force believes the latest draft of this document is a

great improvement over the five goals that were distributed at the last meeting. Multicultural is now gone from the document and replaced with cross-cultural. In the foreign language area, it was suggested that Virginia Tech needs to offer different languages like Chinese, Arabic, and Japanese. There is a focus on education abroad, not just study abroad.

Devi responded that he, too, thought the latest draft was much improved. However, he was concerned that it is unclear what the overall strategic direction is and how the four areas fit together. There has been a significant drop in the number of international students coming to VT. In response, the university needs to figure out how to compete with the international market. While the United States is tightening barriers other countries are lowering theirs. It is the barriers and perception of barriers; we have an image problem. Given this information, Devi posed the question of whether the international strategic plan addresses how to attract and retain students, faculty, and staff.

Kim recommended that the commission look at the four areas and state in clear terms what the commission does and does not support. She suggested this be a written document that could also give some priorities to areas that are of specific concern to the commission like services (equal opportunity, access, etc.) and graduate and undergraduate education.

In the area of support services, there were two areas highlighted. One was the immigration process and how it can be better facilitated. The other was the importance of having a liaison for international matters in each department. A concern was raised about the timeline and who the recommendations would go to. Ray said the deadline is still October 15, but we can provide recommendations until then and they will go to both the provost and the team.

It was suggested that the goals and priorities identified by Devi would serve as a good starting point. They are listed below.

There is a need for an overarching set of goals and priorities. The current documents speak to specific areas of focus, but it is unclear what the overall set of goals and priorities are. The mission and vision statement does not spell them out either. Examples of overarching issues and priorities are:

- Creating an environment at VT that values and promotes international and cross-cultural perspectives
- Increasing the pool of resources and expertise for international programs and services (e.g. grants for international programs, training for faculty and staff)
- Developing mechanisms to coordinate and promote international programs. (e.g. creation of international liaison in every department)
- Attracting and retaining diverse student body (internationally and cross-culturally). The pool of international students is getting smaller due to visa problems and many universities are becoming more aggressive in attracting and retaining high quality international students. We need to undertake concrete steps in this regard. (Business Week article of Oct 4 2004 provides useful facts and figures).
- Attracting and retaining faculty and staff with expertise in international and cross-cultural aspects. Examples include creation of reward systems, training and development, and mechanisms for faster processing of immigration documents and visas.

Discussion then moved to study abroad and the need to improve the quality of the program. It currently is not a university program but something done by individual faculty. One recommendation was to staff up the study abroad office. This led to conversations about the importance of quality in addition to quantity, given that each goal will have a metric.

It was decided since no document could be written before the next team meeting on Tuesday morning, that Kim would act as the official spokesperson of the commission and share some of the discussions. The task force would then meet again and draft something for review at the next commission meeting.

The question was raised about whether all international offices and programs would be located under one central office. There was general consensus that the commission doesn't support consolidation since there are different constituencies that need to be served in different ways. The commission does support the need for accountability and coordination.

A final question was raised about student involvement in the process. It was suggested that students be involved as stakeholders. Kim responded that there was a student representative on the team who is now unable to attend meetings due to a class conflict.

IV. New Business

Review/Discussion of the Short Position Paper on Diversity

Karen DePauw and Ben Dixon provided background information on the paper. The Academic Affairs committee of the Board of Visitors has three priorities this year: graduate education, faculty, and diversity. This provides the university with a great opportunity to affect the way we "do diversity." The committee requested a statement on diversity from the provost. He asked Karen and Ben to draft the document. It includes a philosophical statement and then cites the four dimensions of a diverse university as representation (access and success, via recruitment and retention across academic programs), campus climate and intergroup relations, education and scholarship (teaching, research, and outreach initiatives), and institutional transformation (restructuring to meet all aspects of the institution's mission).

She then suggested that the commission look at policy, personnel, pedagogy, and programs and determine the highest priorities. Work on this should begin fairly quickly so that an update is ready for the next board meeting in November. One suggestion was to place the topic areas in those four areas and move from there. Additionally, if there is a best practice on campus in one of the four areas, it should be cited. Ray suggested this be on the agenda for both commission meetings in October.

Diversity Summit

Ray informed the commission that the Diversity Summit will be fully coordinated by the commission this year. A task force will be formed to work on this. There are models from seven years of the summit for the task force to review in determining the format for 2005. This is a major engagement activity and vehicle for the university community to come together to focus on issues of diversity and a great opportunity for the commission.

Charter University Initiative

Kim Philpott suggested that while there have been numerous comments on the Charter University Initiative from those on campus who authored it, the commission should invite people with different perspectives to come and share their reactions on the impact of this initiative. She then went on to make a motion to have Secretary of Education Belle Wheelan come and speak on the impact on diversity. There was some concern about her ability to speak on this since the initiative is still a work in progress and she is a state official. There was, however, general consensus that it would be good to have a panel with outside perspectives. Other commissions as well as the faculty and staff senates would also likely be interested in this panel. Some members suggested the need to be cautious since the initiative is still a work in progress and stressed the need to prioritize and work on responses to the items in the position paper on diversity. While the motion had been seconded, the chair did not recognize the motion but stated that the commission will pursue the idea of the diverse panel and the Charter University Initiative will remain on the agenda.

V. Next Meeting

The next commission meeting is Monday, October 11, from 10-12 in the Executive Conference Room, Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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