

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Orientation Session
Monday, September 8, 2003

Minutes

Present: Pat Hyer, Ben Dixon, Ellen Plummer, Bill Greenberg, Mary Madis, Susanna Rinehart, Mike Two Horses, Hayward Farrar, Helen Crawford, Edd Sewell, Jean Elliott, Linda Woodard, William Dougherty, Sumeet Bagai for SGA representative, Lanny Cross, Brandon Bull, Meredith Katz, Lois Berg, Darleen Baker, Laura Hickerson, Peggy Quesenberry, Devi Gnyawali, Amer Fayad, Renia Edwards for Kimberly Philpott, Trey Church, Jean Brickey, Kim Beisecker, Betty Fine

Absent: Valerie Hardcastle, Hassan Aref, Susan Willis-Walton, Ray Plaza

Guests: Diane Bell, Jennie Reilly

1. Introductions

Ben Dixon opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Ellen Plummer then asked that members introduce themselves and the area they were representing.

2. Rationale and Background for CEOD

Ben Dixon presented historical information on the creation of the Commission including the purpose of the commission, the development process, and the charge of the commission (see handout with slides).

3. University Governance System

Pat Hyer provided an overview of the university governance system so that members would know the organizational context in which the commission will operate and how governance works at Virginia Tech. In addition to the handout, Dr. Hyer explained the following:

- The Board of Visitors has legal authority and is appointed by the Governor, each member serving a four-year term.
- No more than three members can live outside of Virginia.
- Six out of 13 members must be alumni.
- The board has fiduciary responsibility for the university and they can hire and fire the President.
- The board has total authority with regards to the faculty – employment, policies, raises, etc.
- The board is responsible for the longevity of the physical plant of the university including the sale and purchase of property.
- Policies related to student discipline must be approved by the board.

The commission reports to University Council. The council is advisory to the President and BOV. The faculty and staff senates play a major role in the governance system by appointing

representatives to the commissions and university council. The same holds true for the Student Government Association and the Graduate Student Assembly.

There are specific guidelines for commissions from University Council's constitution and by laws. The job of CEOD is to focus on policies and issues related to the broad community. While there may be a temptation to deal with individual problems that come to its attention, the CEOD can only address them if they represent a pattern. Individual issues should be dealt with through Personnel Services and the Office for Equal Opportunity.

3. Commission Members' Roles and Service Terms

The typical term for students on the commission is one year and three years for faculty and staff. Since the commission is new, membership terms this year are staggered so that a wholesale change in membership doesn't occur every year.

As members of the commission, individuals are responsible for communicating with whatever group they represent and, in turn, reporting to the commission any issues emerging from the group. The meeting agendas will be sent out in advance; the plan is to have minutes approved electronically. The CEOD was created with a built in review of its membership in every three-four years to ensure that there is appropriate representation of the campus community.

4. University Policies on Equity and Affirmative Action

Fain Rutherford, Assistant Director and Compliance Officer for the Office for Equal Opportunity made a presentation on his role and function in the office. In the compliance area he is responsible for investigating and responding to discrimination or harassment based on race, color, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. If an alleged perpetrator is a Virginia Tech employee, the Office for Equal Opportunity is responsible for handling the case. If the case involves student to student, then it is handled through Judicial Affairs in the Division of Student Affairs.

The manner in which a case is handled depends upon the wishes of the complainant. The types of cases run from formal to informal with reports from formal complaints being sent to the president.

Kelly Oaks, Equity Manager in the Office for Equal Opportunity, presented on her role in the office. She is responsible for the development and management of the Affirmative Action Plan. Since Virginia Tech is a federal contractor, it is federally required to have an Affirmative Action program in employment. This is to ensure that additional efforts are made to recruit a diverse population, rather than simply relying on the usual methods. We need to make every effort to be inclusive and need to track what happens to applicants throughout the process.

This year the OEO is moving to an on-line applicant tracking process. So, while the current philosophy for faculty searches remains the same, the mechanics will change. The product, People Admin, was created exclusively for higher education. It is hoped that this will streamline

the process. A demonstration is planned for September with the goal of having it in place by October.

5. Organizational Tasks

a. Election of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson

The vote for chairperson will occur at the September 22 meeting. If individuals are interested, they need to let Alicia Cohen know through e-mail (acohen@vt.edu) or phone (231-1820). Individuals can also be nominated (with their permission). These nominations must be submitted by September 17. Students are not able to serve as chair. The vice chairperson may not be determined until spring.

b. CEOD Operating Procedures

A procedure for selecting at-large members was employed this year but needs to be affirmed or changed, and by laws or operating procedures for CEOD need to be developed. A subcommittee needs to be formed to draft these procedures and bring them forward to the full commission for approval. Pat Hyer has agreed to provide leadership to this subcommittee. William Dougherty, Jean Brickey, and Edd Sewell all agreed to serve.

c. Agenda Topics for 1st and 2nd years (brainstorm)

A number of subcommittees have been suggested by the planning group. These include: By Laws/operating procedures, research, education/training, best practices, and recognition. Time was spent brainstorming topics and areas that the commission might focus on. Ellen Plummer volunteered to take the very broad list of topics and areas and try to put it into a more manageable format so that commission members can then do some prioritizing (it is in the pages following the minutes).

d. Next Meeting

The next orientation meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 22, from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon with lunch immediately following. At that meeting Dr. McNamee will present on the current legal environment for diversity activities and share how the university conducted its review of its programs, and how the university is responding to the legal argument of “Narrow Tailoring.” Additionally, Pat Hyer and Linda Woodard will present various demographic data on Virginia Tech populations.

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Areas of concern identified by Commission members on 9/8/03
as part of the Commission's inaugural retreat.

Commission members will need to prioritize and determine appropriate courses of action. It is important to remember that the Commission's primary role is to address issues of policy.

Concerns articulated by Commissioners appeared to organize themselves around several themes. These themes included how particular policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors impact uniquely situated communities within the university and surrounding environments. Some policies, such as the university's harassment policy, have the potential for having an impact on all members of the university community. Other policies impact communities differently, such as health benefits for domestic partners, or the implementation of the Patriot's Act. Many policies impact particular constituents within the university community, such as promotion and tenure policies that impact teaching faculty, or tuition policies that impact undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. The challenge will be for the Commission to identify concerns that it can appropriately address.

Courses of action for issues and concerns might include:

- referral to another Commission
- addressing the concern in collaboration with another Commission
- referring to the entire CEOD for addressing/disposing
- deferring to a CEOD subcommittee for recommendation
- ignoring the issue altogether
- other?

Guided by the Charge to the Commission and in an effort to guide the initial brainstorming of the Commission, five subcommittees were suggested. The Commission will need to determine if the suggested subcommittee structure is appropriate.

Suggested Commission subcommittees:

1. Operating Procedures
2. Research and Evaluation
3. Education and Training
4. Best Practices
5. Recognition and Awards
6. Others?

The Operating Procedures subcommittee is being led by Pat Hyer and includes Edd Sewell, William Daugherty, and Jean Brickey. This group will develop procedures to guide the functioning and operations of the Commission.

The Commission will need to decide how to best use a subcommittee structure for exploring and addressing selected issues.

Over-arching concerns expressed by Commissioners included:

- What is diversity? What do we mean by diversity? How is the term used?
- Needing to remember that we are all (faculty, staff, administrators) here to educate students.
- Faculty, staff, students, and administrators all need education on how our attitudes and behaviors impact unique communities. All of us play an important role in creating and sustaining a positive campus climate for all communities.
- What do we know about campus climate? Campus demographics? The impact of current policies and practices?
- Benchmarking against similarly situated institutions.
- What assessments have been done? What needs to be done? How have assessments been conducted – do they include qualitative information on the experiences of women and minorities on campus – both in and out of the classroom?

Current Policies / Practices to be reviewed

Harassment

Disability Leave

Tuition – affordability for low-income, geographically diverse students

Patriot's Act – impact on international communities, as well as others

Academic policies and practices

Undergraduate Students – advising, testing, absences, recruitment, admissions, retention

Unique communities include: re-entry students, non-traditional students

Employment policies and practices

Partner hires, special opportunity hires

Faculty – Recruitment, search committees, retention, Promotion & Tenure

Staff – low wages, literacy

Graduate Students – Teaching Assistantships, Research Assistantships

Identifying best practices for race-conscious programs

Policies / Programs to be recommended

Media accessibility – captioning, inscription, etc. of all VT media

Domestic Partner benefits e.g. healthcare

Child Care

Elder Care

Policies / Programs for older students and employees

Climate concerns – students, faculty, and staff

Faculty, student, staff attitudes and behavior toward one another based on perceived status in the institution as well as on personal characteristics

Freedom of expression

Blacksburg, Christiansburg climates

Rural / Urban tensions

Tensions around socio-economic class, geographic background (e.g. Appalachian students, faculty, and staff)