

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, February 16, 2009 – Smithfield Room – The Inn
Meeting Minutes

Present: Craig Brians, Jean Brickey, Shirley Cline, Ross Edmonds, Pat Hyer, Hal Irvin, Aditya Johri, Brad Klein, Kathy Lloyd (for Sheila Carter Todd), Anna LoMascolo, Maxine Lyons, Yolanda Machado-Escudero, Kevin McDonald, Jonathan Moore, Ingrid Ngai, Kelly Oaks (also representing Kevin McDonald), Ray Plaza, Richard Shingles, Guy Sims, Elisa Sotelino, Debra Stoudt (for Sue Ott Rowlands), Mikhelle Taylor, Dennis Welch

Absent: Kim Beisecker, Carson Byrd, Virgilio Centeno, Stevan Jackson, Deborah Morgan, Taris Mullins, Daphne Rainey-Wittich, Ashley Smith, Patricia Smith, Tamim Younos

Guests: Susanna Rinehart, Maggie Sloane

I. Call to Order

Vice-chair Guy Sims called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Minutes from the February 2, 2009 meeting were approved.

II. Welcome – Guests

Guy welcomed guests to the meeting.

III. Susanna Rinehart – OEI Update

Susanna reported on the Development of the Diversity Strategic Plan. Overall this document has been constructed to be a user-friendly document that is adaptable to different departments and can be applied pertinent to the size and focus of various departments. The plan provides an overview of the last 20 years of diversity and then looks at how the Inclusive Excellence Framework will move the university forward. Fundamentally, this approach looks at diversity “beyond the numbers.”

Susanna reported on the curricular transformation effort and specifically the development of a Human Diversity and Community Curriculum. Students will have two courses that will have developmental learning goals built into them. In this model, students would take a course that would feature introductions to diversity concepts and later would take a course that would look at diversity through the perspective of their specific course of study.

A Diversity Development Institute is being developed to assist faculty in incorporating diversity education into their courses as well expanding faculty understandings of topics related to diversity. Modeled after the Faculty Development Institute, this effort would offer resources, workshops, and materials that will assist the university community in further integration of diversity programming.

Brad asked if there were other areas of the Curriculum for Liberal Education that required two courses. Susanna responded that this approach would generally utilize existing courses to cover diversity topics and would not add additional courses to the CLE. This would be accomplished by determining which courses already meet these needs and then build an incentive program for building new courses or modifying courses.

Jonathan asked if the DSP was different from some of the previous versions that have been circulated. Susanna indicated that there was not a great deal of difference.

Pat asked about the official title. Susanna replied that the Human Diversity and Community Curriculum title was specifically chosen to not make this seem like a “requirement” as well they wanted to be clear that this curriculum would encompass global diversity.

Pat asked if the existing Curriculum for Liberal Education covers some of the goals for the Human Diversity and Community Curriculum. Susanna replied that there is some overlap with the existing Area 7 requirements. Susanna elaborated that the upper level course would not be a required course, but that it would explore diversity through the lens of the student’s discipline and would utilize co-curricular strategies in teaching about diversity.

Brad asked about how diversity would be defined; would diversity as it pertains to natural sciences be an aspect of this program? Susanna replied that the focus would be on human diversity and that there would be efforts to bring in people from other institutions who specialize in relating human diversity to specific disciplines to provide expertise to departments as needed.

Guy asked about how success is defined in this effort and how CEOD could help. Susanna replied that the Inclusive Excellence model will help provide a framework for determining success. Susanna also indicated that help with connecting with college diversity chairs as well as a commitment toward self-education would be ways that CEOD could assist. Pat echoed these comments and encouraged CEOD members to work within their constituency groups to promote this effort.

Maxine invited Susanna to work with staff groups as well. Dennis cautioned against over-relying on specific courses to cover diversity but suggested encouraging all courses to cover aspects and topics on diversity. Dennis also sees abandoning a look at numbers as indicators of success as a potential problem as well. Susanna responded by saying that this approach still takes into account “numbers” as indicators of success in diversity but will take into account that the numbers won’t tell the whole story.

IV. Discussion on Threat Assessment Team

Guy reported that this team was set up after the events of April 16, 2007 and is designed to work in conjunction with the Care team. Care team meets on every Monday and covers a variety of issues brought forth through a variety of student venues. The Dean of Students Office provides oversight to this committee.

Maggie elaborated that the Care team looks to respond to students who may be a threat to themselves or others.

Brad asked about how students right to privacy are ensured in these processes.

Guy indicated that Tom Brown would be a future guest speaker and could elaborate more.

V. Diversity Summit and CEOD Participation

Guy asked committee members to assist with table discussions and table activities. The Summit has been rescheduled for February 27th at 2pm at the Graduate Life Center. Ray reported that 100 have registered for the new date and he is anticipating more registration. Ray invited assistance at the registration table from CEOD members.

Committee went on break for 15 minutes at 10:45pm.

VI. Discussion on recent letter to President Steger regarding violence against women.

Copies of a recent letter to the President were distributed for review.

Anna began discussion by relaying that a number of letters have been written over concerns that recent campus notifications on acts of violence against women have been viewed by some as minimizing the impact of violence against women and have tended to encourage a change of behavior only among women. Christine and Anna have communicated with the Virginia Tech Police, and have shared concerns that many individuals feel that a more balanced message is needed to the campus community. The VT police have been very receptive to this discussion and feedback.

Brad asked what the primary concern was that many were having.

Anna replied that in the view of many the messages focused on women needing to change their behaviors and that many believed that a stronger message needed to be sent; that violence against women is unacceptable.

Pat spoke of concern over the larger overtones of the message that these incidents were random, when in fact violence of this sort is often targeted at women and not at all random.

Dennis spoke that practical safety concerns have to be addressed. Anna replied that many felt that more language is needed to accompany the safety alerts.

Craig brought up a point that our heightened awareness towards violence on the campus has led us to believe that our society is more violent when in fact statistics tend to suggest the opposite. Anna replied that the point is well taken that increasing media coverage has raised our consciousness of events.

Maxine commented that lack of information can lead to discomfort.

Anna indicated that there would be an increased focus on anti-violence efforts such as the white-ribbon campaign.

Craig cautioned that we be cautious of fostering a perception that the Virginia Tech campus has unique problems and that violence is rampant.

Aditya raised a concern that many graduate students feel isolated. Many international graduate students come to the campus very independent-minded, seeking to be self-reliant. Some students may perceive that seeking counseling assistance is a sign of weakness and unnecessary dependency and that perhaps more encouragement is needed for international students who may benefit from counseling.

Rick raised concerns over the connection between alcohol and violence. Anna followed up by saying that there are a variety of environmental factors that can contribute to violence including the high usage of information technology for social networking and as well as the prevalence of interpersonal relationships with relative strangers.

Mikhelle also spoke about how the competitiveness in certain academic programs can be a factor in aggressive behavior.

VII. Discussion on filling CEOD seats for 2009-2010 academic year.

Perry reported on the need to fill two at-large seats for CEOD for next year as well as two seats on University Council representing CEOD. Perry asked committee members about the past process and asked if there were any suggestions for changing the process for applying for CEOD slots. It was determined that an ad hoc committee of Guy, Kathy, Ray, and Perry would be set up to oversee the process and that a similar approach would be utilized as last year. This process involves using a questionnaire on the on-line Virginia Tech survey site to gauge a candidate's interest in diversity related issues. Various media forums will be used to advertise this link, including the CEOD website.

VIII. Announcements

Guy reminded everyone of the upcoming Town Hall meetings conducted by President Steger to discuss the budget.

Ray announced that tickets for both upcoming Evening of Spirituals and Black History Month Gospel Concert remained. He also announced about the upcoming Black Constituency Conference.

Ross announced for the LGBT that the movie "Milk" would be playing after the Diversity Summit at the Lyric

Anna announced that they Women's Month Calendar would soon be printed and circulated.

Craig announced that ADA is forming a Disabilities Studies group. Individuals interested in this should either contact him or Virginia Reilly.

Meeting adjourned at 11:44am.

Respectfully submitted,

Perry D. Martin
Secretary to the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity