

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, September 14, 2009 – Graduate Life Center – Room C
Meeting Minutes

Present: Kim Beisecker, Craig Brians, Shirley Cline, Paul Deyerle, Ross Edmonds, Pat Hyer, Brad Klein, Megan Kuhn, Maxine Lyons, Michelle McLeese, Kevin McDonald, Jessie Meltsner (for Anna LoMascolo), Bhanu Peddi, Ray Plaza, Keisha Riley, Guy Sims, Melissa Simpkins, Maggie Sloane, Christine Snider, Jim Snyder, Amy Sorenson, Mikhelle Taylor, Ethan Wechtaluk, Dennis Welch, Ray Williams

Absent: Virgilio Centeno, Shivani Handa, Hal Irvin, Stevan Jackson, Aditya Johri, Sue Ott Rowlands, Daphne Rainey-Wittich, Chris Ramos, Elisa Sotelino

Guests: Maxwell Awando, Virginia Reilly, Susanna Rinehart, Gerald Walz

I. Call to Order

Guy Sims called the meeting to order at 10:05am. Due to some schedule needs of the presenters, Guy asked that introductions and approval of the minutes be shifted to later on the agenda.

II. Overview of recent BOV Presentation on Diversity – Susanna Rinehart

Susanna Rinehart, Director of Education for Diversity and Inclusion in the Office for Equity and Inclusion, presented an overview of an August 30th presentation to the Board of Visitors on Virginia Tech's progress on diversity over the last several years. Susanna summarized findings presented by Vice President Kevin McDonald and Provost Mark McNamee to the Board of Visitors as part of this presentation. Key themes of the presentation were defining diversity, underscoring the importance of diversity at Virginia Tech, and utilizing the Inclusive Excellence model as a framework for accessing our progress in diversity.

In providing data to examine Virginia Tech's progress, the BOV was provided with an overview of diversity-related programs and key events at Virginia Tech during President Steger's tenure. A key focus of the comments of the Board of Visitors was on admissions numbers as they relate to under-represented populations and the degree to which they represent a barometer of Virginia Tech's progress in areas of diversity and inclusion.

In feedback from the presentation, the Board of Visitors expressed a desire to continue to learn about Virginia Tech's progress related to diversity and a committee is to be formed around diversity-related issues. A follow up meeting on diversity will be held by the BOV in December.

Follow up discussion on Susanna's presentation centered-around the need to understand why admissions trends have showed increased numbers for some groups and not others and the degree to which applicants from under-represented populations are surveyed to determine their perceptions of Virginia Tech. Discussion also occurred on the need to utilize the December follow-up meeting as a way to leverage greater support in areas of diversity and inclusion.

III. Discussion on Campus Climate – Tom Brown

Dean of Students, Tom Brown, presented on the Campus Climate Team and proposed a plan for folding the work of the Campus Climate Team into the efforts of CEOD. Tom provided some background on the Campus Climate effort, which began in 2000 and included a broad base of campus groups and was overseen by the Dean of Students office. As participation in the Campus Climate Team has waned over the last few years, Tom noted that much of the original vision for the purpose of the Campus Climate

Team was being carried out by CEOD and the SafeWatch program. In consideration of this, the Vice President for Student Affairs has proposed that the Campus Climate Team be disbanded but that an Ex Officio seat on CEOD be created for the Dean of Students office. This addition of a seat could help insure that discussions on campus climate could continue as a part of CEOD efforts.

Discussion on this proposal included questions about the SafeWatch effort and the nature of concerns that are being shared through that system. Tom indicated that SafeWatch does see a broad spectrum of student comments and concerns, including those that do not relate to diversity related issues. Additional reflections included a review of the origins of CEOD and that campus climate was a key focus area of CEOD's original charter. Discussion followed on whether CEOD was too focused on policy-related matters and whether discussions on campus climate were welcomed by the recent membership of CEOD. The need for greater communication across various representatives of CEOD was discussed as was the need for insuring active participation by various represented groups on the CEOD.

Kevin also requested that as CEOD considers adding a seat representing the Dean of Students, that consideration would also be given to adding a seat for a representative for Outreach and International Affairs and for the Graduate School Diversity Office.

IV. Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the May 4th meeting were approved.

V. Discussion on Policy 1025 – Maggie Sloane

Maggie Sloane, Director of Compliance and Conflict Resolution in the Office for Equity and Inclusion provided an update on proposed revisions to Policy 1025 that were considered during the last academic year. Maggie reported that at the last University Council Meeting of the year, CEOD had presented a resolution for vote which added Gender Identity and Expression and Genetic Information as covered characteristics in Policy 1025. At that meeting, concerns were raised by Faculty Senate that the opportunity for review by their membership had not been afforded and therefore it was requested that the resolution be given an opportunity to be reviewed by Faculty Senate. As a result of this, the proposed revisions are being discussed by Faculty Senate as well as other commissions.

Maggie asked Brad as a member of Faculty Senate and the Commission on Faculty Affairs to provide an update on discussions on the proposed changes.

Comments on the proposed resolution have included concern over the wording of the proposal. Some have suggested that the current words Gender and Sexual Orientation which are expressed in Policy 1025 are already inclusive enough and that adding Gender Identity was unnecessary. Some concerns of adding too many coverages have also been shared. Maggie indicated that she was working with other university officials on revising some of the wording before bringing the resolution back to CEOD for a vote.

VI. Discussion on Policy 4075 – Virginia Reilly

Virginia Reilly, Director of University ADA Services, presented on updates to Policy 4075 which is Virginia Tech's policy on providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities. The current policy was written by HR and does not include language that represents coverage for students. Jennie has worked with Services for Students with Disabilities to add student language and better represent the areas of responsibility of the ADA Office and the SSD Office. Additionally, language is being changed to reflect state/federal law changes as well as language that is reflective of Virginia Tech's Principles of Community. Ray Plaza asked for clarification about the appeal process and the role that OEI would be playing in that process. Ethan also asked for clarification on how issues related to student conduct are conveyed in the policy.

VII. Taskforces – Ross Edmonds

Ross Edmonds provided an overview of the CEOD taskforce structure and indicated that more information on the task forces would be provided at upcoming meetings such that members could decide on which task force they preferred to serve. Ross asked for suggestions on additional task forces. Michele suggested a Campus Climate Task Force in light of the suggestions of the Dean of Students. Jennie suggested a task force that would oversee university-wide diversity awards. Ross indicated that a more complete description of the task forces would be provided after consideration of the new proposed task forces. Ross also indicated that January 22nd was being targeted for the Diversity Summit.

VIII. Announcements

Ray Plaza announced the formation of a new Latino initiative, Nuestro Advance, which is a comprehensive outreach effort to Hispanic/Latino students at Virginia Tech. Ray also announced several upcoming events related to Hispanic/Latino students.

Virginia Reilly announced that on October 19th there would be a Disability Awareness event at Virginia Tech.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:06pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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