

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, October 5, 2009 – Graduate Life Center – Room B
Meeting Minutes

Present: Kim Beisecker, Craig Brians, Virgilio Centeno, Shirley Cline, Paul Deyerle, Ross Edmonds, Shivani Handa, Pat Hyer, Hal Irvin, Brad Klein, Meghan Kuhn (represented by Ro Settle), Anna LoMascolo, Maxine Lyons (represented by Jean Brickley), Michelle McLeese, Sue Ott Rowlands (represented by Debra Stoudt), Bhanu Peddi, Ray Plaza, Keisha Riley, Melissa Simpkins, Guy Sims, Maggie Sloane, Jim Snyder, Amy Sorenson, Ethan Wechtaluk, Dennis Welch, Ray Williams

Absent: Stevan Jackson, Aditya Johri, Kevin McDonald, Daphne Rainey-Wittich, Chris Ramos, Christine Snider, Elisa Sotelino, Mikhelle Taylor

Guests: Ken Belcher, Jean Elliott, Curtis Mabry, Virginia Reilly, Dale Robinson

I. Call to Order Chair of the Commission, Guy Sims, called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

II. Approval of Minutes The minutes from the September 21st meeting were approved.

III. Update on LGBT Issues at Virginia Tech – Ken Belcher and Jean Elliott

Ken Belcher, Chair of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Faculty Staff Caucus provided an overview of recent celebrations and discussed some ongoing challenges within the LGBT community at Virginia Tech. Ken highlighted recent successful events including the university's first Lavender Ceremony held as part of May graduation. This event which arose from discussion within CEOD's LGBT Task Force will continue this year. Ken also spoke about the high interest in the Gay in Appalachia series and that there was a good response from the presentation from the most recent speaker Dorothy Allison.

Ken also talked about ongoing efforts to create a welcoming climate for transgender students within the Residence Halls. Recently constructed residence halls offer gender neutral restrooms in some portions of the buildings. This effort compliments existing work by Student Programs, Housing, and Dining Services to work individually with transgender students to determine living situations that would be the most comfortable.

Ken and Jean also discussed ongoing challenges that the LGBT Caucus is addressing. Recent campaigns highlighting the "Virginia is for Lovers" slogan have drawn concern from many individuals who believe that the slogan, however intended, does not represent the reality of laws as they apply to many Virginians. The Caucus also remains attentive to the possibility of adding Gender Identity to University policy 1025 and continues to seek progress in the inclusion and support of transgender individuals in the campus community. The Caucus also continues to seek the addition of "plus one" benefits as an option for employees.

As these issues are discussed within the campus and the extended community, there remains a concern by many that if members of the LGBT community speak out on these issues that there could be repercussions against them professionally. The Caucus has been concerned over incidents where some individuals have been reprimanded disproportionately and in some cases forced out of their job, because of their activism. Anna reiterated the importance of LGBT allies to offer advocacy within the university community.

IV. Update on Black Caucus – Ray Williams

Ray Williams, President of the Black Caucus, provided an overview of the organization and their recent efforts. The Caucus continues to host First Friday mixers at D2 which provide an opportunity for friendship and networking. The Caucus also plays an active role with the Doning of the Kente Ceremony, which follows many African traditions and emphasizes the university's recognition of the achievement of African-American students.

Some key concerns of the Caucus include that as an institution, Virginia Tech has not been able to sustain an attraction for African-American students. Additionally, there remains a need for progress in attracting and retaining faculty of color at the institution.

To help address these concerns, the caucus has two main areas of focus. These include a focus on the diversity within the African-American community; recognizing individual difference while still maintaining a cohesive unified group. Secondly, the caucus has a focus on getting out to the greater community the contributions of its constituents as well as the successes that the university has had related to diversity. Ray spoke about upcoming events in 2010 such as the Black Constituency Conference and Black Alumni Reunion that will enhance connections between faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members.

V. Human Resources Diversity Outreach Opportunities – Curtis Mabry

Curtis Mabry provided an overview of efforts in Human Resources to increase the diversity of faculty and staff. Curtis reported that an outreach team within HR leads these efforts. Among the strategies incorporated, include a focus on advertising in national publications oriented toward diverse audiences, active community involvement with regional education partners, involvement in local job fairs and fairs at HBCU's in the State of Virginia, and advertisement through various social media. These efforts have resulted in an increase in under-represented applicants. Feedback on the presentation included a suggestion that further tracking of the retention of applicants be implemented. There was also a suggestion of greater recruitment from VT students. Another suggestion was to examine the types of jobs being occupied by diverse applicants.

VI. New Mediation Program for Students – Dale Robinson

Dale provided background on the Conflict Resolution Program at Virginia Tech which began in 2005. In 2006, trainings were held to develop a core group of mediators in workplace disputes. This training followed a social justice model of conflict resolution which explores possible underlying reasons for disputes. To date nearly three dozen conflicts have been addressed through mediation.

Dale discussed an expansion of this program into the student life areas of the university. Last summer, the Conflict Resolution Program developed a proposal to the Vice President for Student Affairs to bring Mediation programming to students and to develop a student advisory group to the development of this program. While a number of conflict resolution programs exist in various programs in student affairs, mediation is one form of conflict resolution that would complement existing programs related to student conduct. Mediation processes would never be mandated of students and the mediation process would always be considerate of power differentials between the participants in mediation. This mediation process would also be different from the individual counseling focus of the Cook Counseling Center of which many students are already familiar.

VII: Policy 4075 – Virginia Reilly

Virginia Reilly requested that representatives from other commissions and groups review the amendments to Policy 4075 and offer feedback. Work will be done on creating a resolution 4075 to be presented at a future meeting.

VIII. Discussion on CEOD Task Forces – Vice Chair, Ross Edmonds

Ross encouraged CEOD members to sign up for a Task Force. Additional descriptions and summary of time commitments for each Task Force would be sent out to the membership.

IX. New Business/Announcements

Concern was raised over university events being held on Yom Kippur and CEOD was encouraged to educate the greater community on the significance of this observance in the Jewish faith. Jennie announced upcoming Disability Awareness Month activities. Paul reminded members about THE Forum and Ray Plaza passed out information on the Latino Festival in Roanoke. With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 12:09pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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