

Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity
Monday, September 15, 2008

Minutes

Present: Mikhelle Taylor, Craig Brians, Virgilio Centeno, Brad Klein, Ray Plaza, Rick Shingles, Kelly Oaks (for Kevin McDonald), Ross Edmonds, Debby Morgan, Taris Mullins, Maxine Lyons, Hal Irvin, Jean Brickey, Daphne Rainey, Jonathan Moore, Yolanda Machado-Escudero, Shirley Cline, Elisa Sotelino, Guy Sims (for Zenobia Hikes)

Absent: Pat Hyer, Kim Beisecker, Kathy Lloyd, Patricia Smith, Sue Ott Rowlands, Anna LoMascolo, Stevan Jackson, Dennis Welch

Guests: Maggie Sloane, Silvia Ramos-Cotton, Jamie Penven, Megan Armbruster

I. Call to Order

The agenda was adopted.

II. Welcome

Daphne welcomed new members and went over the materials in the folder including the overview of the commission which is now beginning its sixth year.

III. Diversity Strategic Plan

Copies of the draft of the diversity strategic plan were distributed. This is a public document and ready to be vetted. It will be presented at the November Board of Visitors meeting along with a scorecard that will be used to assess our efforts. Time will be spent at one of the next two commission meetings discussing this. Please share it widely and send Ray any feedback. It is open for changes/adaptations at the college and department levels. There was a question about the number of measures but it not everything in the plan will necessarily get measured each year and right now we may not even have the ability to measure certain items, so some measurements will need to be created.

IV. Report from the Implementation Team

This report was also included in the packet of information. Funding has been secured for 2008-09 and the university is moving forward on some of the recommendations from the implementation team.

V. Strategy 2008-09

Daphne referred to an article sent out with the agenda focusing on the need for creating community for our changing culture. She stressed the need for the commission and university to be on top of change and not operate within a vacuum. One of the challenges is reaching beyond "the choir." There was a task force last year dealing with issues for international graduate students. Issues continued over the summer when funding ran out before some students had time to finish their degrees. They have been working with Ennis McCreary and she could be invited to a meeting of the commission to discuss the work she has been doing on behalf of the graduate students. Jonathan shared that one of the challenges for graduate students is staying informed on what is happening on campus. The Graduate Student Assembly is starting a program called GUMP this year, graduate undergraduate mentoring program. The goal is to help undergraduate students learn how to apply for graduate school, what graduate schools are looking for, etc. There continue to be issues related to graduate students since there aren't guidelines for addressing issues in a consistent manner and departments deal with graduate students differently.

Mikhelle shared that they are working on retention of Native American students and with Virginia tribes on outreach and finding opportunities for students to do internships. There is also a need for mentor relationships for potential new students. They hope to increase membership in the student organization at VT and find students who would be willing and interested to go to high schools and help with the recruitment.

A question was raised regarding the university vision for the recruitment of minority faculty. There are a number of items in the implementation report that focus on this and indicate a strategic effort to build relationships with people in the pipeline, use diversity cluster hires, and work on the retention through mentoring and other programs. The provost has committed funds to build up the Africana Studies department and next week is the Gathering at the Grove, a reception and dinner for diverse faculty and staff hosted by President Steger.

A concern raised was the need for the commission and the university to look beyond race and gender when working on diversity issues and programs. Some in the LGBT community remain afraid and do not see this as a supportive place. There is a need for course offerings that relate to LGBT issues. Additionally, courses in the faculty development institute need to encompass all aspects of diversity. The students did open a new LGBT resource center in Squires. If other resources are needed, it would be helpful to have the caucus bring them to the attention of the commission. This could be an area of focus for the commission this year.

Finally, the issue of the winter holidays was raised again and the need for somehow communicating the need to be sensitive to the fact that not everyone is Christian and there are potential problems for those who do not celebrate the same holidays.

Daphne closed the meeting by asking members to think about speakers who they might want to invite to a future meeting and how best to use the time allotted for these meetings. This might include having taskforces meet during times outside of the commission meeting schedule. It is hoped that a vice chair will be selected at the next meeting. Maggie will be presenting the anti-discrimination policy in October.

VI. Announcements

Ross shared that Roanoke's Pride in the Park is this Sunday, September 21 from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. in Elmwood Park. They will be showing "Another Woman" on October 18 at 7:00 p.m. in the Graduate Life Center. Ray announced that Hispanic Latino Heritage Month began on Sunday with a Latino Festival in Squires. He also thanked those who attended the 4th annual multicultural luncheon. There were around 275 in attendance to hear Michael Lee. Brad is working with individuals from Wake Forest on migrant farm worker health as it relates to their exposure to pesticides, etc. There will likely be a program in the spring for those who may be interested. Finally, Mikhelle shared that they are starting a student chapter of Architecture for Humanity which will promote issues of social justice and humanity. It is an interdisciplinary group open to anyone interested.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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