Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, April 25, 2005

Minutes


Absent: Devi Gnyawali, Marilyn Kershaw, Laura Hickerson, Hassan Aref, Sam Cook, Patcharee Phongsvirajati, Brandon Smith, Jon Wooge, Leon Geyer, Jean Brickey, Ruth Grene

Guests: Mary Grace Campos, Fain Rutherford, Ellen Plummer, Jennie Reilly

I. Adoption of Agenda
The agenda was approved as presented.

II. Chair Report
Ray shared that there was a diversity retreat last Friday with college diversity committee chairs and committee members along with others involved in diversity issues. Ben Dixon spoke at the retreat about the review of the diversity strategic plan which will need the support and assistance of the commission as well as the diversity committees. Dr. Farrar was honored at the Black Caucus dinner. The subcommittee reviewing the at-large applications forwarded four names to the President’s office. Ray has heard that the Lee Hall recommendations have been endorsed by the President. More information should be available shortly on the implementation of those recommendations.

III. Old Business
A. Constituent Reports
Susanna Rinehart distributed a report from the LGBT Caucus which highlighted some of the significant challenges faced by this community beginning with the passage of HB 751 into law. The report also included achievements, challenges, and issues for the future. Some questions arose regarding partner benefits. Linda informed members that with the higher education restructuring, Virginia Tech has no control over the state’s health insurance plan or retirement plan. There are other ways that the university can provide leadership, though, with things like providing gym passes for partners. The commission can play a role as an ally and supporter.

Susanna also provided a report from the Faculty Senate. They have developed a strong working relationship with the commission and enjoyed its first year of departmental representation. Some of the challenges and concerns for this group include salary equity, recruitment and retention of faculty, pressures created by the goal of “top 30,” struggles with work/life issues, the need for a stronger sense of community among faculty members, and lack of clarity about expectations.

B. Policy 1025 Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Prevention
A question arose regarding why sex was switched to gender in the policy. Susanna presented information from Bernice Hausman regarding her concern about this shift. When she raised the issue at University Council, Kay Heidbreder shared that legally there isn’t a distinction made between these terms. Pat informed members that the decision was made with the intent to be inclusive and to provide the most coverage. A motion was made and seconded to leave gender as
the term in the policy. It passed unanimously. A request was made to articulate the rationale for leaving gender in the policy as a response to Bernice’s concern.

IV. New Business
A. How To Guide – VT Principles of Community
The discussion began with utilizing the principles in the classroom. There was considerable discussion about whether or not to have students sign and acknowledge acceptance of the principles. It was also suggested that faculty can stress the importance of adhering to the principles in class discussions. Another recommendation was to see the extent to which the principles had been achieved by incorporating relevant questions in the student assessment surveys done by John Muffo.

The second area was the workplace. Conversation focused on the need to bridge the education gap – to explain the VT Principles in depth. It was also suggested that faculty and staff could sign off on them like they have to sign off on the Business Conduct Standards. The principles should also be sent out with offer letters to new employees. Ben recommended creating an on-line, fifteen-minute presentation around the principles with clear expectations and consequences for violating them (those reside in various university policies that would need to be identified). People could sign off on them after completing this on-line component. Due to time, Ray suggested discussion on other areas will continue at the next meeting.

B. Procedure for At-Large Faculty/Staff and Student Seats on University Council
With the adoption of the new membership for University Council, the commission is responsible for election of two at-large positions – one for students and one for faculty/staff. Ray distributed a draft survey to use. Some changes were made to the survey. It will be available later this week with the deadline of May 6 so they can be voted on at the last meeting on May 9.

VII. Next Meeting and Announcements
The next commission meeting is May 9. A new chair and vice chair will be elected at that meeting. Ray reminded members that the last EO director candidate presentation is tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. Ben reported that Susan Anderson was given a special award last week as part of the Victory over Violence events. The meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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