Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
Monday, September 26, 2005

Present: Ray Plaza, Cynthia Bonner (for Zenobia Hikes), Craig Brians, LaChelle Waller, Michael Goode, Jean Brickey, Ross Edmonds, Susan Willis-Walton, Edd Sewell, Benjamin Dixon, Richard Benson, Linda Woodard, Ann Kilkelly, Kim Beisecker, Tapsavi Bhargava (for Aisia Haque), Aaren Salido, Carlos Evia, Rick Shingles (for Ruth Grene and Susan Anderson), Sheila Carter-Tod (for Marilyn Kershaw), Sam Camden, Kevin McDonald, Maxine Lyons, Valerie Hardcastle, Ellen Plummer

Absent: Sue Ellen Crocker, Tina Harvey, Sumeet Bagai, Kris Tilley-Lubbs, Pat Hyer

Guests: Chad Disharoon, Susanna Rinehart, Laura Gillman, Akilah Chopfield

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

II. Chair Report/Discussion
A. Review of Commission and Roles
Ray reviewed the history of commission; the roster; and the roles of the chair, vice chair and commission members. A chair manual is being developed and will be shared at the next meeting. The current plan is to have the vice-chair assume the role of chair in their second year. There are ten individuals eligible. Some members voiced concern over having the vice chair assume the role of chair, especially with the way the membership changes. Further discussion and a vote on this will occur at the next meeting.

Commission members are expected to serve on at least one task force and it is also critical for them to serve as facilitators at the Diversity Summit since it falls under the purview of the Commission. Ben Dixon commented that there should be specific language regarding the role of members who represent communities. There needs to be open communication both from the member to his/her respective community and from the community back to the commission.

B. Historical Review
Ray provided a synopsis of the Commission accomplishments during its first two years.

C. Updates on Major Commission Initiatives
Regarding the Virginia Tech Principles of Community, copies of the postcard and bookmark were distributed throughout the summer. Roxanna Link was instrumental in designing these items. The signed document is available on-line. In addition to articles in the VT Conductor and the Prism, a bulletin board was developed for residence hall staff, a “how to guide” was finalized, and a number of undergraduate and graduate students were trained and assisted in presentations to various administrators/offices across campus. Michael Goode shared how receptive the deans and other administrators were during theses presentation. LaChelle discussed how graduate students became involved in the summer at a level greater than they had been. Ellen Plummer added that during incoming new student orientation, the principles were passed out to each student. They were also displayed and read aloud each night. The orientation leaders also folded the principles into their discussions and role plays. Additionally, they were distributed at transfer student orientation. There are standard, framed versions still available. Roxanna Link (rdlink@vt.edu) is the contact person for those copies. Ann Kilkelly asked about conversations that occurred between January and the signing in April. Ray responded that concerns from the Alumni Association about the language in the principles led to some suggested changes. The majority of other groups, however, wanted that language put back in, so the document that was signed included the original language.
The principles have been translated into 13 different languages. Those versions will be distributed as appropriate. It has been proposed to develop a VT Principles of Community Ambassador Group. This group will be made up of students, faculty, and staff. These individuals would assist with continual presentations across campus. Other ideas include a poster, t-shirts, marketing items, an anniversary celebration, placement in classrooms, and incorporation of the principles in the Burruss Lobby area. Ray and Ben met with a representative from the Athletic Department to figure out how to fold that department into these efforts. Some ideas include public service announcements and displaying the principles in athletic programs. Michael suggested a large banner hanging at the stadium would be desirable. The How To Guide was distributed and reviewed. Ray asked that members review the guide and send any edits to him. Laura Gillman recommended a task force might work on some of the suggestions in the guide to develop more concrete strategies. Ben shared that a call should go out to the university community to find out how individuals have incorporated the principles in their work. Kim indicated the presentation used at summer orientation is available for individual use. It is accessible from the diversity webpage.

Some of the items from the Lee Hall recommendations have been accomplished. The history of the residence halls has been developed. Each student has received a history of his/her own hall and a document with the history of all the halls will be accessible on the website. Some other items require some financial support. Ray plans to meet with someone from the President’s Office to determine the status and priority for other recommendations.

The Diversity Summit is tentatively scheduled for Friday, January 20. Ellen shared that there is a Provost Retreat that day which would prohibit a number of administrators from attending. A task force will be responsible for this event and will look at other possible dates.

IV. Agenda Items for Year Three
Ray shared what was presented at University Council as potential agenda items. These included: follow-up on the Lee Hall Recommendations, VT Principles of Community, campus climate as it relates to the LGBT community (Michael Sutphin from the LGBTA will be presenting concerns and issues at the next meeting) and individuals with disabilities, exit survey data, pipeline initiatives, revisions to the diversity strategic plan, and college diversity committees. These are based on constituent reports from last spring as well as conversations with ex officio members and other administrators. Ellen asked if commission members might have a role in the education and training efforts being coordinated by the Offices of Equal Opportunity and Multicultural Affairs. After an inventory is completed, the new Director of Training and Education will be able to share ways in which the commission can get involved. There will be an on-line training program for sexual harassment and preventing employee discrimination. Valerie suggested the commission might also want to have a conversation about education and training in regards to whether or not training is optional or mandatory and who should be involved and when.

2006 marks the first year that VT doesn’t have classes on MLK day. Ray suggested the Commission take the lead in organizing activities in celebration of this holiday. He proposed that the CEOD calls a meeting with selected organizations and offices. Ben asked if any units were contemplating or planning activities. Laura recommended that Afrikan Studies be included in any conversations. The question was raised whether or not students would be back for activities since classes don’t start until Tuesday. LaChelle shared that most graduate students would be here, but Michael wasn’t sure about the undergraduates. The Black Caucus has also been talking about bringing in the community at large and not just focusing on the university community. A formal vote was taken. A statement will go out in the next few days with the hopes of scheduling a meeting in the next week and one half. Michael suggested maybe planning a week-long celebration that could include the diversity summit.
V. Task Forces

In order for the Commission to be effective, task forces need to be utilized. However, the task forces will need to do some work outside of commission meetings. Members only need to be on one task force. Proposed task forces include: campus climate issues, college diversity committees, diversity summit, diversity in the faculty dossier used for promotion and tenure, exit survey results, LGBT climate, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. An additional group might work on the VT Principles of Community. Edd suggested that separating the LGBT climate from campus climate is a mistake. The LGBT issues are part of the greater campus climate issues. Kim shared that many groups are feeling unheard. Rick added that the charge be expanded. The task forces will be responsible for creating their own charges. The provost has some groups already working on some of these issues, so the task force needs to work with existing groups. Linda recommended another task force might look at how to integrate a number of policies including the anti-harassment policy and campus violence prevention policy. This group could give some thought to how we take advantage of these policies in terms of communication. Cynthia asked if there needed to be a task force to deal with the Lee Hall recommendations. Given the number of task forces already, it was suggested to hold off on the Lee Hall recommendations as a task force until later. Richard Benson strongly urged that the MLK Celebration and Diversity Summit be one and that there truly be a strong tie to the community. This could include inviting guidance counselors and others to campus to start to change the perceptions many outsiders have about Virginia Tech. There was consensus to combine those, so Lee Hall was added as another task force.

Linda recommended that there are aspects of the exit survey data that relate to other task forces like campus climate. These results need to be shared with the appropriate task forces so they can use that data in the work they are doing. The task force group might be a referral group to pass the information on to the appropriate task force. Ben suggested that Ray send a revised list to members and request any feedback on the charges. For many task forces, a lot of information and data exists, so the task forces could begin working immediately. The meeting on October 17 is designated as at time for task forces to meet.

The next meeting is October 3 at 10:00 a.m., in the Duckpond Room at Skelton Conference Center. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia P. Cohen
Assistant to the Vice President for Multicultural Affairs