

Diversity Council
January 30, 2009
Minutes

Present: E. Abercrombie, D. Acosta, L. Billionis, C. Collins, S. Downing, K. Faaborg, G. Hand, V. Hardcastle, J. Heisey, T. Herrmann, M. Livingston, B. Marshall, R. Martin, D. Merchant, N. Pinto, B. Rinto, K. Robbins, R. Rosensweig, G. Wharton

Absent: A. Ingber, H. Kegler, A. Leonard, M. Leventhal, M. McCrate, D. Meem, C. Miller, E. Owens, D. Padur, K. Simonson, M. Spencer, M. Stagaman, A. Vamadeva, W. White

Chair Report

L. Billionis recognized J. Bryan as a new member of the Council in his new role in the Provost Office and K. Faaborg continuing on the Council in her new role in HR. He reported on a meeting the three of them recently had along with M. Livingston regarding support for African American faculty.

L. Billionis reflected that our endeavor reaches well beyond the Diversity Council and depends greatly on various other groups and offices that serve as “nerve centers” in support of diversity. These make up a constellation; the work does not happen alone but in unison. Not all of the work will be pleasant; there will be occasional controversy and dispute. Such controversy and dispute is actually positive – it propels us forward and ensures continued commitment. M. Livingston reinforced this message about how we connect in a significant way. L. Billionis had another reflection about the economic downturn and some will have a tendency to divert attention away from diversity work because of this reason, and it becomes even more important to keep diversity on the agenda. We have to keep building on the momentum, recognizing all the energy to advance the agenda.

There has been an email campaign from students concerning a full-time staff person and permanent space for LGBTQ. L. Billionis welcomes such communications. He and M. Livingston have responded to all inquiries and the Council has been copied. The Council will continue to be mindful of their concerns and those of others who are likely to come forward.

The Non-Discrimination Policy was approved by the Board of Trustees on 1/27/09 (copies distributed). Language was revised to recognize certain groups of people are not discriminated against. This action led to a review of the policy on Affirmative Action which was revised to make this change. The new policy now embeds Affirmative Action more comfortably. In addition to the changes in this policy, there is an audit underway of all university policies and rules to ensure diversity language is consistent. E. Abercrombie expressed concern with the term “minority groups” being used. N. Cavanaugh from the General Counsel Office will be asked to provide an update on the status of the audit.

CDO Report

M. Livingston reported in the short history of the Diversity Council, two actions have been taken to the Board of Trustees: 1) revising the mission statement to include diversity and inclusion, and 2) the non-discrimination policy. In both instances, the Board has been enthusiastic and supportive of these requests which affect a cultural change at the university.

M. Livingston reported all have been asked to take a 13% permanent reduction in the base budget; this includes the diversity budget. Requests can be made for exceptions and he plans to do so for diversity.

A total of 12 proposals were submitted for the incentive program and six have been selected for awards. N. Pinto reported the proposals were of high quality and very innovative making the decisions difficult. Notifications will be sent shortly to all submittals and those who were not successful will be encouraged to apply again next year.

M. Livingston reported conversations have continued between leaders at UC and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (NURFC) with the goal to create a more formal tie that is mutually beneficial by sharing resources. A draft agreement has been created that identifies various programs and activities for collaboration. T. Kershaw, the new head of African and African American Studies, has expressed an interest in this collaboration.

The Graduate/Family Housing Report has been submitted to the President and she accepted it in the letter and spirit but it cannot be implemented until the university is financially capable of carrying out the plan. It identifies designating the Dennis Street side of University Park to be used for this constituency and it would take \$2.5M in subsidy to make it affordable (\$400/month) to these students.

N. Zimpher has officially signed off on the Birmingham Pledge committing the university as an organization pledging against acts of racism. R. Rosensweig reported Student Government is very likely to be signing as well.

M. Livingston referenced several documents recently sent to the Council – Race Exhibit, United Way Report on the State of the Community, Hispanic and Interfaith calendars. In regards to the Race Exhibit, L. Billionis is exploring the possibility of the Council holding a future meeting at the Museum Center and then viewing the exhibit followed by a “talking circle”. All agreed such a session would be beneficial. Additionally, the Museum Center is hosting training sessions for facilitators for the “talking circle” on 2/13 & 2/14 for interested parties.

M. Livingston reported on two upcoming events: Profiles in Courage on 2/18, 6 pm at the Alumni Center and the Ethnic Reception on 2/24, 4 pm at Mick & Mack Café.

Subcommittee Reports

B. Rinto reported her subcommittee is waiting direction on their plan from the Leadership Team, specifically how are the recommendations to be implemented and responsible party. Plans for the Diversity Conference are proceeding well having received 30 proposals for presentation. The next step is to begin promoting the conference and assistance from the Diversity Council is requested. H. Kegler and A. Ingber are working on an award program.

K. Faaborg reported her subcommittee has melded into the Provost Committee on Diversity and there is much energy at the table. They are reviewing the five-year plan and have made the first round of awards from the money allocated by the Diversity Council. T. Perzigian will be making an announcement about the awards soon.

G. Wharton reported on behalf of K. Simonson stating they have continued to work on a template which was shared several months ago and they hope to present at the next meeting.

M. Livingston reported on a conversation he had with G. Hand about branding and how the Council is perceived on campus. If the Council doesn't make its brand known, then others will make assumptions and brand you. A reference was made about requests presented to the CDO and if certain ones are appropriate. In the communication plan, there is a statement about the Council's function and how to communicate. There is not one established mechanism to reach into the community; it is up to each member of the Council to do so. If this is not done, then the campus will reach its own conclusion and brand the Council. If inappropriate requests are going to the CDO or Council, it's not the fault of the submitter; it's the responsibility of the Council and what is conveyed. The Council and CDO do not need to approve every diversity activity/program across campus; others need to take responsibility for whatever initiatives they wish to pursue.

Work of the Council

It was agreed a collective understanding of the Council's role needs to be clarified. L. Billionis stated the report from the Diversity Task Force identifies an institutional framework but it is not specifically charted. He asked for ideas on the role the Council should play and how to make an impact.

J. Heisey shared her confusion on the role of Council members. Is it to take action or to serve as a catalyst to empower people on campus?

R. Rosensweig suggested holding a meeting/retreat specifically to address this issue in a more conducive environment and with a consultant. He would prefer two separate sessions – one to collect information and then time away to process, returning to determine results.

M. Livingston reinforced L. Billionis' earlier comments on reaching out to energy centers as an active catalyst. The Council cannot do all the programming/action, but it is a good resource. There are larger resources out there and they need to be tapped into. How the Council is structured is another set of issues. This is very similar to the structure for Just Community.

L. Bilonis stated this concern over the Council should not be seen negatively, but as natural in its evolution and an opportunity to strengthen the Council and its work. Comments will be taken into consideration with the Leadership Team.

LGBTQ

B. Rinto asked for assistance in how to communicate to this contingency of students about their requests for a full-time staff person and permanent space. M. Livingston and L. Bilonis have communicated to all about the approved non-discrimination policy. M. Livingston has met several times with students about these issues and space has been identified on the sixth floor of SSLC. Students may be confused about whether the space is temporary versus permanent. M. Livingston confirmed it is permanent unless another, more attractive space becomes available. He has his budget hearing on 2/24 and will learn more about the diversity allocation and the reduction to its base. Students also need to be aware of the dire budget environment the campus is experiencing where programs will be cut and individuals will likely lose their jobs. However, M. Livingston is exercising all his options with the budget prior to making a decision on the position. L. Bilonis and M. Livingston will prepare a statement to send about these two issues. It was noted that if the position would be funded, what kind of precedent does this set for other students/groups/organizations seeking funds for similar requests. Again, this is something that needs to be clarified about the Council and how it is perceived on campus. Is it a funding resource?

G. Hand shared there may be other alternatives available for resources within the Campaign for funding requests.

Islam/Muslim Students

R. Rosensweig asked for assistance in his efforts to deal with conflicts between these two groups. For the past three weeks, there have been dueling presentations causing confrontations. He is concerned about what may happen and is seeking proactive ideas to avoid any negative situations. Any thoughts should be forwarded directly to R. Rosensweig.

Minutes approved by L. Bilonis and M. Livingston.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday, March 2, 8-12, Retreat, 425 TUC

Monday, April 13, 8-11, Race Exhibit & Meeting, Cincinnati Museum Center

Monday, May 4, 1:30, 419 A&B TUC

Thursday, June 4, 10:00, 310 University Pavilion

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