Status of Diversity Council of the Faculty Senate
Meeting Date: November 4, 2013
Time: 12:00 – 1:30 PM
Location: Campus Center Room 903

Minutes

Present: Mzamo Mangaliso (co-chair), Ernie Washington (co-chair), Ritika Bhakri, Doris Clemmons, Ingrid Holm, Merav Kaufman, Ernie May, Sharon Mills-Wisneski, Marie-Christine Polizzi, Stefanie Robles, Annemarie Seifert, Amilcar Shabazz, Nate Whitmal

Apologies: Alberto Ameal-Perez, Jeung Choi, Willie Hill, Sarah Hutton, Joel Martin

Guests: Professor Dan Gordon and Professor Dick Bogartz

Co-Chair Ernie Washington called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm, welcomed all present, and reviewed the agenda.

The minutes of October 7, 2013, were reviewed and approved with correction of “CDAC” to “Campus Diversity Plan” by the present members.

Co-Chair Mzamo Mangaliso introduced the two guest speakers who had been invited or had offered to speak to the SODC on matters that affect the status of diversity on campus.

1. First guest speaker, Professor Dan Gordon, Interim Dean of the Commonwealth Honors College (CHC), briefly discussed the issue of admissions in the CHC with the goal to drive up the numbers of the students of color (SOC), indicating that a diversity plan would emerge by the end of the year from the CHC. Action items discussed were outreach (previously there have been no outreach); consideration of community college transfers (using HCC as a case study, students who qualify are not transferring because they are not being told they qualify to transfer); and the Emerging Scholars Program, initiated by Professor Alex Deschamps, which creates a pipeline of underrepresented students into the CHC. The question of how to maintain high academic standards and yield underrepresented students keeps coming up. Dean Gordon noted that the Fisher v. University of Texas Supreme Court ruling does not pose a barrier for the strategies being planned because we’re not talking about affirmative action. An extended discussion ensued and several other issues were raised. In the end Dean Gordon expressed a desire to maintain regular contact with the SODC to funnel information to and from the CHC.

2. Second guest speaker was Professor Dick Bogartz of the Psychology Department, Moderator of the Faculty Senate, and member of the JTFSO. His message was that the notion of the existence of race should be dismissed. There is only one human race. Differences between humans are cultural, linguistic and ethnical. The use of the term “race” (or questions such as: ‘which race are you?’ that we see everywhere in the administrative paperwork here) is prohibited in other countries such as France. Diversity goes way beyond race. Denying the use of the term ‘race’ will not mean that we are in a post-racial color-blind America, or that we are denying the existence of racism. UMass can move into a leadership role with respect to this issue, and might become a main/major attraction for recruitment. As a first step,
Professor Bogartz suggested that the SODC can prepare a special report for the Faculty Senate explicitly highlighting the lack of biological basis of race, and ask the Senate to make it its official position that race does not exist. Some members of the SODC expressed concern about the futility of picking a battle against the existence of race when we should be fighting racism instead. The GSA representative responded that for some students, race is a big part of their identity and to reject the idea of race would mean to deny their identity. It might end up doing more harm than good to try to eliminate race from the student’s perspective.

3. Diversity Score Card: The DNA of this institution is the providing of access to quality higher education to all people of the Commonwealth. How do we repair the damage to URM’s to be able to have a more level playing field, remediate the damages done so that they might be able to enjoy greater access? The problematic use of language “URM” was discussed. Ideas were asked on how to address how to get at the language problem without reproducing the sense of whiteness/blackness/racial ways of thinking. How do we create a scorecard that measures without the pitfalls of racial thinking/framework? Steps to be taken on the DSC: Pilot other models used around the country and tweak them in departments around campus and see if it’s a good fit. Investigate how the faculty wants to be engaged with the process. Select 1-3 departments to agree on a set of measures that will be germane to their department. Have them come up with indicators that they want to see to indicate their progress over time that are transparent, available and quantified, that can galvanize attention and motivation.

4. Students Response to Instruction (SRTI): Reference was made to the draft memo that Ernie Washington had prepared about the ongoing problems with the SRTI evaluation forms. He offered to confer with the leadership of the MSP and other members of the Committee that was formed to find an improved evaluation tool that would truly reflect teaching effectiveness, especially where it concerns women and faculty of color.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 PM. The next meeting will be held on December 9, 2013, in Campus Center Room 804.

Respectfully submitted,

Stefanie Robles with contributions from Marie-Christine Polizzi