ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

STATUS OF DIVERSITY COUNCIL

FOR

ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017

Presented at the
777th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
April 12, 2018

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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The Status of Diversity Council (SODC) is charged as follows:

The Status of Diversity Council shall make recommendations on all matters affecting the status of diverse populations and underrepresented communities on the campus including such matters as faculty librarian and staff recruitment retention promotion and salaries the recruitment admission and retention of undergraduate and graduate minority students granting of financial aid and the development of programs to reflect the needs of our diverse community.

The SODC met on the first Monday of every month during the Academic Year 2016-2017 for a total of seven meetings – three in Fall 2016, and in four in Spring 2017. Throughout the year the SODC maintained strong collaborative working relationship with other campus councils, committees, and organizations that deal with issues of diversity and inclusion. These included the Chancellor’s Diversity Advisory Committee (CDAC), the Status of Women Council (SOWC), the Massachusetts Professors Union (MSP), and the Joint Task Force on Strategic Oversight (JTFSO), to name a few. Individual University officers were also invited to make presentations to the Council on issues of concern. The highlights of the year are outlined next.

At our first meeting on October 3, the main topic of discussion was the Campus Climate Survey. Enobong (Anna) Branch, in her capacity as the Chancellor’s Faculty Advisor for Diversity and Inclusive Excellence, led the discussion. In her remarks, she talked about what the survey was intended to accomplish, the target campus stakeholders to fill the survey, and projected response rates from each. Another topic discussed was the role of SODC in the implementation of the Campus Strategic Plan.

At the second meeting held on November 7, the focus was on the SRTI (Students’ Responses to Teaching Instruction) forms, and the difficulties in accessing the SRTI data from the administration in order to test whether these evaluations showed bias against women, diverse faculty, and graduate student teachers. The decision was to survey the faculty and graduate student TAs about their experiences with SRTI. Another topic the was discussion was the question of minority admissions, and questions about the commitment of UMass-Amherst to having a critical mass of URMs. The decision was to invite a representative from the Provost’s Office to address the Council about the plans being put in place in this regard at the next Council meeting.

The meeting of December 5 featured, Leykia Nulan, Assistant Provost for Diversity in Enrollment Management. She spoke about the new structure of undergraduate recruitment, which focused on a holistic process, and offered new informative sessions for prospective students and families. She noted the concern about non-native English speaking student eligibility, and the emphasis on need for academic writing support. She suggested that we need to look beyond offering financial aid in order to attract a more diverse student body, assessment of previous failures to raise awareness of main issues and problems.

After the holiday break, the meeting of February 4th 2017 was dedicated to a discussion of the impact of the Presidential Executive Order, recently passed by newly inaugurated President Trump, that banned people from seven Muslim majority countries from entering the United States. Several graduate students from the countries named in the ban, mostly from Iran, attended the meeting to give testimonials about their experiences and how the ban has impacted their lives. A sub-committee was created to review the Impact of the Presidential Executive Order to report at the next meeting.
At the meeting of March 6, invited guest John McCarthy, Senior Associate Provost, and Dean of the Graduate School shared his perspectives on the impact of the President’s executive order on international students from the affected countries. He also shared information about his new charge focusing on immigration as related to the recent executive order. The ensuing discussion focused on how the UMA community can help support students who had planned to go home for the break and/or vacation but could not travel home because of the new Executive Order. Another invited guest, Ken Reade, Director of International Students and Scholars Services (IPO), also shared information about the efforts of the IPO work on behalf of international students. A report of the Council’s sub-committee on the Impact of the Presidential Executive Order was shared, and arising questions addressed. The council also discussed the Draft Diversity Learning Outcomes document by the Gen Ed Council. Consensus appeared to be that more detail and specificity was needed regarding how outcomes would be accomplished.

Among the issues reported at the meeting of April 3, were: (1) The impact on undergraduate enrollments of the Presidential Executive Order imposing entry restrictions entry into the US on people from the six predominantly Muslim countries. Invited guest, Jim Roche, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Admissions attended the Council meeting to provide an update on the trends in undergrad admissions in the time of President Trump; (2) Progress on the Diversity Scorecard – following a general discussion at the Chancellor’s Diversity Advisory Council, a small group met to discuss the metrics to be used in the Campus-wide Diversity Scorecard; and (3) The GEC Proposal on Diversity Learning Outcomes – some Council members expressed grave reservations with regard to its objectives, and whether the materials for the courses were appropriate to students of color and other minority students. It was decided that a special meeting of the SODC be scheduled to discuss the GEC proposal on the Diversity Learning Objectives, and take a position on it.

A Special Meeting of the SODC to discuss the GEC Diversity Learning Outcomes proposal was held on Monday April 24. After an extended discussion, the members resolved as follows: (1) That the phrasing of the second diversity learning outcome – the second bullet point on page 1 – be revised to read: “Students will develop the ability to understand, articulate, and critically analyze diverse social, cultural, and political perspectives at the intersection of race, class, and gender.” (2) Outcomes #3 and #5 ask that students demonstrate awareness and communication skills acquired from DU and DG courses, and yet the criteria for demonstration are left to the instructor’s discretion, as is the custom for nearly every course at UMass. Believing that this discretion is associated with an important responsibility, and that the development and evaluation of these important skills will require thoughtful, deliberate and sustained interaction between students and instructors, that the GEC be urged to investigate best practices for these outcomes, and to support the development of guidelines that will help instructors to properly develop and evaluate these skills in their classes. After the recommended modifications were made, the new proposal passed the Faculty Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

Mzamo Mangaliso & Ernest Washington
Co-Chairs, Status of Diversity Council